

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

NAG

PC PLAYSTATION XBOX WII MOBILE

COMMAND & CONQUER

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VOL 12 ISSUE 5 08.2009 SOUTH AFRICA R42.00



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08





"THE GODFATHER OF FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS RETURNS"

XBOX 360 THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

Wolfenstein™

AUGUST 2009



PLAYSTATION 3



Games for Windows



XBOX 360



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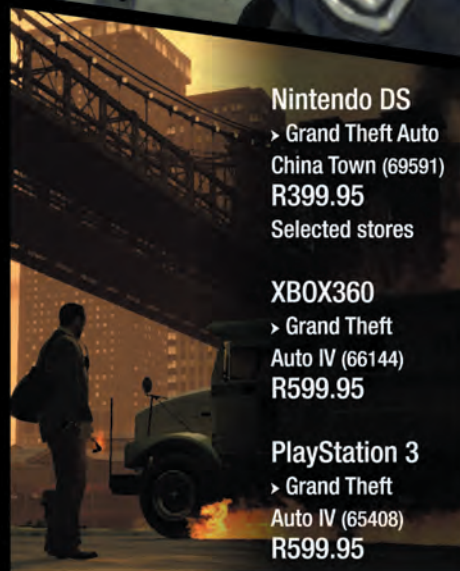
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Drivers

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Extras

The Elder Scrolls II: Daggerfall [Full Game] | Half-Life 2 - Action Half-Life 2 | SACM July

Patches

Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3 - v1.11 Patch | Company of Heroes: Tales of Valor - Patch v2.502 to v2.600 | Grand Theft Auto IV - Patch #3 | Necrovision - Patch v1.2 | The Sims 3 - Patch v1.27 Spore - Patch v1.04 | S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Clear Sky - v1.5.10 Patch

Game Videos

2012 Movie Trailer HD | Alpha Protocol - Walkthrough Trailer | America's Army 3 Trailer | Batman: Arkham Asylum - Combat Techniques Interview | Battlefield 1943 - Guadalcanal Trailer | Battlefield Heroes - Gameplay Trailer | Blood Bowl - Races Trailer | Call of Duty: World at War - Shi No Numa | Darksiders: Wrath of War - Turmoil Trailer | Dead Space: Extraction - Controls Trailer | Demon's Souls - Gameplay Trailer | Fight Night Round 4 - Gameplay Trailer | Ghostbusters: The Videogame - Lore of the Spiderwitch Trailer | Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince - Launch Trailer | LittleBigPlanet PSP - Debut Trailer | MAG - Developer Diary | MAG - PMCs Documentary | MAG - The Shadow War Documentary | MechWarrior 5 Trailer | Necessary Force - Debut Trailer | Need for Speed: Shift - Driver Profile Trailer | Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2 - Gameplay Trailer | Overlord: Minions - Launch Trailer | Red Steel 2 - Walkthrough Trailer Part 2 | Soul Calibur: Broken Destiny - Gameplay Trailer | Spore: Galactic Adventures - Playing the Missions Trailer | StarCraft II - Multiplayer Interview 1 | StarCraft 2 - Multiplayer Interview 2 | StarCraft 2 - Multiplayer Press Gameplay | The Conduit - Launch Trailer 2 | The Conduit - Launch Trailer | The Sims 3 - Scary Parents Moviemaker Trailer | Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10 - Launch Trailer | Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen - Gameplay Trailer | Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen - Multiplayer Trailer | Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen - Multiplayer Walkthrough | Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen - Shia LaBeouf Documentary | Trauma Team - Debut Trailer | Trine - PC Demo Gameplay Trailer | Uncharted 2: Among Thieves - Beta Gameplay Trailer 1 | Uncharted 2: Among Thieves - Beta Gameplay Trailer 2

E3 Videos

Alan Wake - Lead Writer Interview | Arcania: A Gothic Tale - Firemage Gameplay Trailer | Army of Two: The 40th Day - Executive Producer Interview | Assassin's Creed II - Lead Designer 'Venice' Interview | Assassin's Creed II - Patrice Desilets, Jade Raymond Interview | Assassin's Creed II - Walkthrough Trailer | Avatar - James Cameron Interview | Batman: Arkham Asylum - Lead Designer Interview | Battlefield: Bad Company 2 - Senior Producer Interview | Bayonetta - Gameplay Trailer | BioShock 2 - Multiplayer Interview | Blur - Debut Trailer | Blur - Interview | Borderlands - President Interview | Brütal Legend - Gameplay Programmer Interview | Darksiders: Wrath of War - Boss Walkthrough | Dead to Rights: Retribution - Gameplay Trailer | Demon's Souls - Mechanics Interview | Dragon Age: Origins - Director Interview | Fairytale Fights - Debut Trailer | Fairytale Fights - Producer Interview | Fight Night Round 4 - Sugar Ray Leonard Interview | Final Fantasy XIII Trailer | Final Fantasy XIV Online - Debut Trailer | Forza Motorsport 3 - Arcade Walkthrough Trailer | Forza Motorsport 3 - Improvements Interview | Fuel - Launch Trailer | Gears of War 2 - Dark Corners Debut Trailer | God of War III - Combat Interview | Guitar Hero 5 - New Features Trailer | Just Cause 2 - Walkthrough Trailer | Little King's Story - Walkthrough Trailer | MAG - Gameplay Trailer | Marvel: Ultimate Alliance 2 Interview | Metroid: Other M - Debut Trailer | Microsoft - John Schappert Interview | New Super Mario Bros. Wii - Debut Trailer | Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2 Trailer | Nintendo Booth Tour | PixelJunk Monsters Deluxe Trailer | PixelJunk Shooter Trailer | PlayStation 3 Line-up | Postal III - Studio Tour and Interview | Project Natal - Features Interview | PSP Go - Developer Walkthrough | R.U.S.E. - Tunisia Demo Part 1 | R.U.S.E. - Tunisia Demo Part 2 | Red Steel 2 - Walkthrough Trailer Part 1 | Rogue Warrior - Project Lead Interview | SAW - Debut Trailer | Section 8 - Frag Fest Gameplay Trailer | Singularity Interview | Singularity Trailer | Sony Computer Entertainment - Jack Tretton Interview | Soul Calibur: Broken Destiny Trailer | Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Conviction - Creative Director Interview | Super Mario Galaxy 2 - Debut Trailer | Tekken 6 - Co-op Gameplay Trailer | The Last Guardian - Debut Trailer | Tony Hawk: Ride - Interview | WipeOut HD - Fury Trailer

Retrospective C&C

C&C 4 Retrospective Trailer

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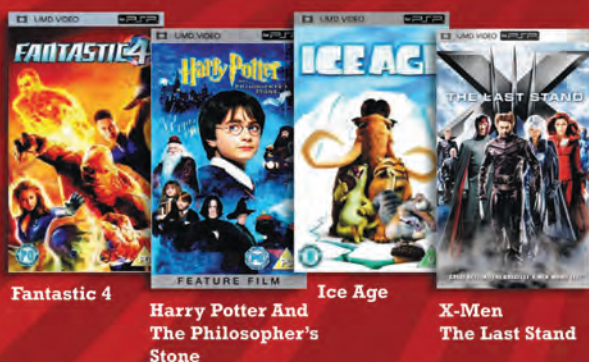
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For the Fans

Gamers have armpits too, you know.

I WOULD LIKE YOU TO have a look at pages 25 and 27 in this issue. Had a look yet? Okay, I'll wait... all done? Good. These two pages are important because here we have a 'men's lifestyle' company advertising to you – a gamer. They're one of the first companies to realise that gamers are people too, who have skin and hair, drive cars and even eat food. Just like everyone else. Gamers are also unique because we're (generally speaking) young, intelligent and have money (or eventually will because of the intelligent part). Speak to us in the right way, time and place, and you increase brand loyalty. So, examine these adverts and give the products a try and show your support; and we'll end up with more adverts like this and then I can increase the size of NAG with more gaming content and eventually go on to rule the world and buy a more expensive sports car. Along with all our regular gaming and hardware clients, FNB is also in this issue advertising their unshaped ADSL – call them, find out what they have to offer and make sure you tell them that you saw their advert in NAG. In the world of magazine advertising, car companies stick with car magazines, deodorant companies stick with men's lifestyle magazines, and so on. It's a private little fairground where we all go around and around doing the same things until someone with a little vision tries something different. This is especially important in tough economic times. It's a significant change (business people talk about paradigm shifts) of pace for us. Your job in all of this is to support those companies that think you're important enough to talk to and forget about the ones that don't.

RAGE 2009

Because I'm in the know, I can tell you that rAge this year is looking rather good in terms of special offers from the retail sector. So, I suggest that you start saving up now – by the time you read this, there will only be two months to go until the craziness of the rAge weekend begins. Everything from games to 3D cards, special editions to comics and figurines will be on display... and right under everything will be a special sign that says, 'Special Offer'. Keep checking the Website (www.rageexpo.co.za) and forums for announcements and news... It's going to be epic.

I hope you enjoy the free E3 supplement with this issue, and thanks from my side to the writers and designers and most importantly the companies that made it possible – Electronic Arts South Africa, Look & Listen, Ster-Kinekor Entertainment, Megarom and Corex. Hats off people, we couldn't do it without you. Special hugs and kisses! ;)

Michael James
Editor

Postscript: Finally, happy birthday to Vaughn Bayes on the 2nd of August from Jade – Vaughn, you're a lucky man! ;)



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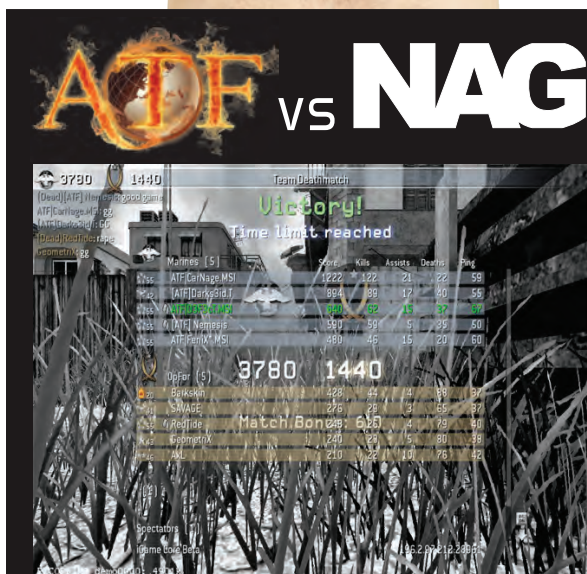
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Boom! Headshot!



The Slaughter of the Lambs

NAG was challenged by the *Call of Duty 4* clan ATF the other night... and... Um, well... they ended up giving us a good lesson in how to play the game. There's a screen somewhere on this page with the grisly details. Well done to Carnage, Darks3id, D3F3cT, Fenix and Nemesis for being the lions in our field of lambs. We asked them to write a few words about where we went wrong. Gulp.

"During the game between ATF and NAG, the only real shortcoming the guys from NAG had, was that they weren't as coordinated a team as the ATF players were – functioning as a unit, especially when playing Vanilla *CoD*, is essential. They played really well, with all of them showing great potential, GG WP NAG" – [ATF] D3F3cT

"NAG played well in most regards. Perhaps ATF, with much more experience (with over 9,722 hours of *CoD 4* online gameplay logged), was what decided the winning team." – [ATF] Fenix

"iGame provides our team with a fulltime training ground, known for its high gameplay standards; this serves to improve both individual and team gameplay. The NAG guys played well individually and gave it their all – well played." – [ATF] Carnage

"Well played NAG. Some of your 'nade' spots were excellent; aiming and shooting weren't bad at all, just concentrate more on aiming and choosing the correct perks. Team coordination is vital to the success of a team as well." – [ATF] Darks3id

"Though some of us have only recently started playing for ATF, the experience gained from regularly playing on the iGame servers definitely gave our team the upper hand. The added exposure to top-quality players on these servers also helps to better your own game, because if you don't shape up, you'll tend to find yourself on the lower half of the score sheet. NAG's team put in a valiant effort, but in the end it came down to experience and our team didn't let up once we got on top of the other team." – [ATF] Nemesis

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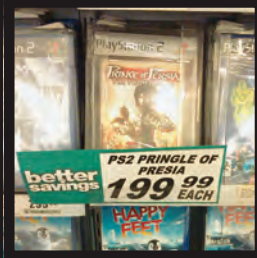
Letter of the Moment

FROM: Thoniel

SUBJECT: Prince of what?...

"THE OTHER DAY I went to a supermarket and like any other normal gamer out there I went straight to the gaming section. My eyes caught a sign saying SPECIALS and because we are in a recession, blah, etc. I thought this is where I needed to be. To my shock they have a game on special which I have never seen or heard of before. It is called Pringle of Persia. So I did some research and visited every single game review site and I even phoned my grandmother to find out if she played it back in her days - but with no success. Luckily they had Exhibit A on display and the game was actually Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones. I even attached a picture if you guys don't believe me. I mean, what the...!? How do you miss-spell a word that Prince becomes Pringle. The only connection I can see between the two is the phrase 'Once you pop you can't stop'. It's like gaming - once you start playing you can't stop or something stupid like that. The other possibility is that Pringle is a luxury knitwear company in Scotland so they might be responsible for the wardrobe in Prince of Persia. Lastly I think it might be a teenager who just started at this supermarket and he/she only has fast food and Pringles on the brain and unfortunately they put him/her in charge of the signs. I have one thing to say to you: next time read what you write and if you are not sure of the spelling, please do not use your initiative again, go and speak to your manager and if he/she can't help you then I am afraid that the T-Virus is very real and only your zombie friends would be able to help you. Please follow the white light. I will forgive you this time, but next time I am going to get Mark-us Fenix from Spears of War to come and kick your backside."

Oh dear. Ed



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The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

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FROM: Theo

SUBJECT: Demise of dad's NAG magazine

"IT IS WITH REGRET that I have to announce that I no longer am the holder of exclusive rights to my favourite magazine. I have been fending off challenges from my two sons Dominic (10) and Jared (8) for exclusive rights for the last few months, but it all came to a head last night with a bold and decisive strategy move (they are great players in those games) where the challenge was to be the first to find the badger - which of course I lost! I subsequently established that they had conned their mother into getting a peek at NAG a few hours before and then set me up for the fall (I am not convinced of my wife's

innocence in this one although she does protest it). I am now without my relaxing magazine writing this e-mail with much emotion. I hope that Father's Day may see a reversal of my fortunes and the return of my powers (I will have to use all my cunning to best these two).

My sons wish to say a word or two as well.

1. The Badger is on page 52 in the multiplayer column.
2. We will never give up the NAG magazine it's ours!

To all other fathers out there, please send me some ideas to defeat these villains."

Here's what you do: buy three copies of the magazine each month - really simple. I've got a Porsche on backorder, and I'm a little short with this whole economic slowdown. Ed.

FROM: Peanut

SUBJECT: Inbox: To Ed

"I JUST WANTED TO SAY that I realize that reading all these emails must be irritating and tiring, especially from the knowledge of how most people can't even use a spellchecker. I solute you."

Groan, Ed

FROM: Alistair

SUBJECT: Techno Curse

"WELL, I KNOW THE subject line may sound like the name of a bad DJ, I really think I am a victim of some kind of Technological Voodoo... My beautiful, kind, loving Xbox 360 went down the dreaded 'Red Ring Of Death' road, and is now staring sadly at me from the corner of the room. My sweet little iPod nano froze, and had to be recovered, so I lost a whole bunch of stuff that I had been storing on it... I accidentally deleted 3GB of music, which I can never get back, as I deleted it all to save space on my limited laptop hard drive. My two-week-old phone got its screen cracked. So far, I've had lousy luck with Technology this year. I can't afford to fix my out-of-warranty Xbox, and I'm a sad panda. Please help me keep my sanity, and keep NAG going strong, or else I feel I will have to dye my hair black and start wearing my fringe over one eye. Thanks NAG, you guys are pure awesomeness, because you grow it yourselves!"

I've heard stories about people like you. The bad news is that the 'technology curse' usually wins and you eventually give in and move to a small farming community to grow potatoes or mate ostriches. The good news is that I can help you... I usually charge a couple of thousand for my time and advice, but you seem desperate; and I've just banked a fat 'bribe cheque' to give the new Transformers game a 90%+ rating (too bad they didn't make me sign anything). Ready... The problem is that you're attracting all these problems into your life because you're convinced that you are cursed. If you dig deep, you'll discover that the problem lies with you. So, just before bedtime each night (for the next month), stand in front of the mirror and repeat the following phrase:

"There is no problem with the technology. The problem is with me thinking there's a problem with my technology. I am attracting this defective technology into my life and when I somehow manage to accidentally get good, strong, working technology, I just break it like a fool anyway. I must not blame the technology." Just keep doing this, and everything will go right for you. It's all about attraction. If not, then you probably are cursed - good luck. Ed

FROM: Chris

SUBJECT: An Idea

"I DON'T KNOW IF YOU guys are interested in ideas for your magazine, but I thought I would share one of mine." [Snip, Ed]

Umm, no thanks... We already have all the good ideas. Ed.

FROM: Fanie

SUBJECT: Reviews of Tarryn

"I AM A GAMER THAT enjoys games alot, but what I hate about some gamers is their comments and reviews of games. Let's take Ninja Blade as an example - Tarryn scored the game lowly, and she rated the game with her thoughts about a helmet? I can't take her review seriously anymore. She judged the game by its cover. I bought the game and it is 1 of the best games I have ever played! The game is like to watch an action packed movie. It is understandable about 3 bosses per level; it makes it even better than other games with 1 boss. Each boss is different from the next and is awesomely modelled. So Tarryn, you are a disgrace to the gaming world and no one can take your reviews seriously..."

I'll pass your comments along - anonymously. I heard that Tarryn actually owns a chainsaw attached to a shotgun and has already pre-ordered the prestige edition of Modern Warfare 2 - the one with the night vision goggles. My two cents: you are wrong, of course. I played that game and it's a real 'ponies' piece of 'ponies'. :! Oh look, Tarryn replied (now bear in mind this has been heavily edited - we're a family magazine after all), "He wrote 'a lot' as one word. Lol." Sorry, she doesn't like criticism. Ed.

FROM: Christian

SUBJECT: 18SNLV

"IF THERE IS ONE thing in the world that annoys me - and only one thing - it would definitely be the rating system. I can understand if they don't want to show a digitised full frontal shot of someone to a 13 year old, but violence and language is such an everyday thing. I mean honestly people being shot, stabbed, dismembered or whatever will not cause permanent harm, will it? I can personally say I've heard pretty much every cuss in the dictionary, from people on the street, at parties and even at school. Oh and don't get me started with the media. You could see more dead, bashed in, etc. bodies in newspapers, tabloids and even the good old SABC News than in most games (okay not most but it

NAG Fan artwork

This is the best of what we received during the month. If you can insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo, you might also end up here for your three lines of fame. This entry wins a Gamers Gear t-shirt!



Pieter Visser: "I created this piece of fan art especially for all you hardworking guys and gals at NAG. Hope it complements the quality of your magazine. Cheers." *[Now this is what I call fan art. Excellent job – you should be getting paid to create stuff like this (but not by me), Ed]*

adds up). So why are games and movies any different? I wish they would just realise that they should stop giving unfair ratings and leave my friends violence and language alone! Come on, if anyone had to choose they would surely choose X-men Origins: Wolverine above something like Rayman Raving Rabbits. You get my point. Oh and by the way you guys rock – keep making an awesome magazine."

You sound like someone whose parents are doing a good job; and naturally, you think the whole 'world' is against you. Age restrictions are in place for a reason. However, I do think that with today's rate of education and media exposure, they [the top two] should probably be adjusted down by two years (16+ becomes 14+ and 18+ becomes 16+). I don't know any teenager over the age of 14 who doesn't know everything. ;) But then again, I'm not a child psychologist. My advice: just chill out. When you're older, there'll be plenty of time to see people being killed. Ed.

FROM: Jaco

SUBJECT: Re: June's Ed's Note.

"READING THE ED'S NOTE of June's issue, I was amused at how people seem to compare the film industry with the gaming industry. I'm a hardcore film buff (I work in the industry), but also adore games (love my Xbox); and I think I figured it out. See, on the surface, both games and movies seem to specialize in visual spectacle. Crowds flock to movies with eye-scorching effects and games with awesome graphics. In essence, though, games and movies are two completely different beasts. Much like

a novel, any good movie's primary concern is with story and character. All the special effects in the world couldn't replace a good narrative. That's why a good book can so often turn into a good movie (just read and watch No Country for Old Men for proof).

But a game's primary goal isn't story. It's gameplay. Now don't get me wrong; an engaging storyline and well-rounded characters can greatly enhance any game (just play Mass Effect), but isn't gaming an interactive medium after all? By its very definition, a game's main draw has to be the action (i.e. gameplay). It could have the best story ever imagined, but if your interaction with that game is compromised, it's simply no good.

And that's where the confusion comes from. That's why we so often expect the same standards to apply to both mediums (and why games almost never make good movies, and vice versa). There is simply no point in remaking a masterpiece like The Godfather, because all you could hope to contribute today is new effects, sound design, etc., but the substance, the narrative, the nuance and the all-important subtext is already there. So what's the point? With advancing technology, however, you can always improve gameplay. I say bring on the Wolfenstein remake. It's going to surpass the original in every possible way. Just leave Citizen Kane the hell alone."

I'm not 100% sure what you're saying (i.e. the real 'message' behind the 'message' – if you know what I mean), but it certainly sounds like you know what you're talking about. So, all good then – thanks. Ed **NAG**

On The Forums

QUESTION: Do you use any social-networking services like Facebook, LiveJournal, Twitter or MySpace, and if so, why?

vii: "Yes, and I have no idea why I log on to that horrible time sink they call Facebook :/"

DukeOFprunes: "I use Facebook to satisfy all my voyeuristic cravings. I'm pretty sure that's why they made it."

BlackMage: "Steam-Friends and only Steam-Friends. It's fun to add people I've actually interacted with, as opposed to judging by portrait on some social networking site."

Seblat5ch: "I use Facebook for background checks on the PPL that I've met and any woman LOL and the pictures"

Machine: "Facebook for shows, gigs and various happening in clubs and it's basically replaced my e-mail. MySpace has died; it's only good for looking up bands. That's it."

FreakKing: "Steam and Facebook. Because I need to tell people that I recently survived a nuclear explosion, etc.!"

Tieron: "I used to have Facebook and MySpace, but I grew tired of both after like a month. It's so pointless; it's just another way for the newer generation to not learn any real social skills."

-Bouncer-: "Facebook. How else will I get notified if it's somebody's birthday?"

BTR0G: "Facebook and Mxit, mostly so that I can chat with friends and play those awesome Facebook applications."

Bonezmman: "Facebook only. Had Skype, got bored. Although, now I can't express myself on Facebook as before since older members of my family discovered it. ;_;"

Xcaliber: "No. I like living in my bubble. Its softener fresh."

PI2070+YP3: "Facebook, mainly because of all those quizzes OMG! Ha-ha."

Elyaradine: "I use Facebook. To, like, check whether she's single before I embarrass myself."

Fredder: "I use/used Facebook, to catch up on old friendships, but it is getting long in the tooth, people do move on, (sniff-sniff). :D"

Gambit: "I use Facebook on a daily basis... got a little Twitter account going but I mainly use it to hear what Miktar, Stephen Fry, Gldm and FourZeroTwo are getting up to :)"

CaViE: "Facebook, because notifications make me feel important..."

Kharrak: "I'm on Facebook, but mostly because I woke up one day to discover that I was already on it. Something of a jarring moment that..."

Toi: "I don't use any, no. I have a phone which I use to make phone calls to friends."

Gh0sT_828: "No. I find them boring and pointless. I am much happier in my own little world [population: 1]."

..Enigma..: "I have Facebook... I tried MySpace once upon a time, but about 3 weeks with no friends got me off it."

wisp: "Don't use any off them cause I am a social misfit... wisp doesn't play well with others"

Error: "No! Old men/women in basements hit on you...!"

\$CHN!TZ3L: "Facebook... I joined it... I hate it... but for some reason I can't get enough of it..."

Tigman_1: "Facebook, because I like being told my IQ is above 140."



Break from tradition

"This is not your father's MechWarrior"

THE MECHWARRIOR VIDEOGAME BRAND, which is now 20 years old, has come a long way. It's had a troubled history, as the licence has been passed along between publishers; from Activision to Microprose and eventually settling with Microsoft – where it's been dormant for seven years following the 2002 release of *MW4: Mercenaries*. But now, industry veteran Jordan Weisman (founder of FASA – the board games publisher behind the original *BattleTech* as well as the cyberpunk RPG *Shadowrun*) and Piranha Games president Russ Bullock have teamed up, bought the licence back from Microsoft, and are getting stuck into development of an all-new *MechWarrior* reboot.

The game will take place in the year 3015 – during the Third Succession War and before the start of the original *MechWarrior* series. Players will take on the role of nobleman Adrian Khol on the House Davion-controlled planet Deshler along the Kurita frontier. Khol, who's a bit of a black sheep in the family, is out attempting his *MechWarrior* certification for the umpteenth time when House Kurita attacks, destroys everyone he loves and promptly forces him into the position of reluctant hero.

While many of the *MechWarrior* features that you know and love will make a return in one way or another (mostly improved upon, at the very least), there are a number of changes that the team is looking at implementing to take this reboot of the series to the next level, while still making it fresh enough to interest new players. One such idea is the concept of information

warfare, which Russ Bullock describes as "You can't just hit the 'find nearest target' key and cycle through enemies in the nearby vicinity; you've got to find that information first." What this will bring is an increased use of mechs across the classes. Since much of the combat will take place in an urban environment, using a light-class mech such as a Jenner will allow you to quickly work your way through the streets, hop on top of the more resilient buildings and perform a sweep of enemies in the area. Then, utilising the bigger heavy and assault mech classes, lay a trap for the unsuspecting foes.

As is common these days, this age-old franchise will also be heading to consoles, but currently only the Xbox 360 has been named (although no publisher has yet been found, so this may well change in the future). Bullock explains, "We feel confident obviously in the PC and its control scheme that can be realised because it's been done before. But for the Xbox 360, we've spent a lot of thought and a lot of time in playing around with the controller and finding ways to give the same level of control in the way that you throttle, in the way that you turn and move, use your jump jets, and everything that gives you that *MechWarrior* experience that doesn't turn it into a power-up pickup sort of arcade-style game."

There's also talk of up to four-player co-op play through the single-player campaign, further heightening the need to use all four classes to the best of their abilities and not just rush in with guns blazing.

GET THE ELDER SCROLLS II FOR FREE

If you've somehow slipped through the space/time continuum and managed to miss out on everything *Elder Scrolls* before *Morrowind* (or worse, *Oblivion*), now is a great time to make up for the hours of joy you've missed. Bethesda has officially released *The Elder Scrolls II: Daggerfall* – for free. Many *Elder Scrolls* fans believe, graphics aside, that *Daggerfall* is the best in the series, and it boasts one of the largest game worlds available even today. So, what are you waiting for? **Pop in this month's cover disc and install the game.** You'll also need to grab DOSBox (which is on the cover disc) to get it up and running, unless you're the type who keeps a secret 386 stashed in their kid brother's room for just such retro gaming emergencies.



Blizzard wimps out of LAN play

Blizzard has officially confirmed that *StarCraft II* will not support LAN play in any manner. While this might not come as a surprise to many, based on the same announcement for *Diablo III*, it's certainly a blow to the gaming community; and is seen by many as a slap in the face for everyone who supported the first game. Blizzard's plan is to keep multiplayer gaming purely on Battle.net.

"We don't currently plan to support LAN play with *StarCraft II*, as we are building Battle.net to be the ideal destination for multiplayer gaming with *StarCraft II* and future Blizzard Entertainment games," a Blizzard representative said in a statement. "While this was a difficult decision for us, we felt that moving away from LAN play and directing players to our upgraded Battle.net service was the best option to ensure a quality multiplayer experience with *StarCraft II* and safeguard against piracy." The statement continues: "Several Battle.net features like advanced communication options, achievements, stat-tracking, and more, require players to be connected to the service, so we're encouraging everyone to use Battle.net as much as possible to get the most out of *StarCraft II*."

The response from the community has ranged from outrage to a promise never to purchase a Blizzard product again. Understandably so; many consider *StarCraft* to be the ultimate LAN game. It's still actively played all over the world and has a massive following in South Korea as a competitive RTS.

LucasArts classics coming to Steam

LucasArts is continuing their retro rampage with a torrent of titles making their way on to the Steam distribution service. A number of great adventure games are available: *The Dig*, *LOOM*, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* as well as *The Fate of Atlantis*. There will, of course, be a handful of *Star Wars* titles, including the excellent *Republic Commando* and *Battlefront II*. These titles are available immediately from \$5 (R40) to \$20 (R160).



Face buttons for punching faces

If you've recently picked up EA's *Fight Night Round 4* and found the inability to smash faces with the face buttons a little disturbing, you're not alone. Following a wide-spread whinge from the community about limiting boxer fighting to the dual analogue sticks, the developers have buckled and will include face button operation for combat in their second, free "DLC" scheduled for release in September. They don't sound too happy about it, however. Senior Producer Dean Richards said, "We strongly believe that the refined Total Punch Control is the most intuitive way to throw punches in *Fight Night Round 4*, but we also want fans of the franchise to have an option."

Before the second DLC becomes available, players will have access the first (also free) DLC, which will include some actual content along with a few bug fixes. There will be new equipment for your boxers, a training venue for *Fight Now Mode* that was previously only available in *Legacy Mode* and more adjustable sliders including the counter punch window, boxer stamina, and punch accuracy. Additionally, Xbox 360 owners will receive an alternative version of Sugar Ray Leonard. This first DLC should be available sometime in August. EA is remaining quiet on the advent of premium DLC.



Why is this so appealing?

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 is on its way and is set to dominate the holiday sales this year, but if you're not quite sold or are hungry for a little more than just the game, perhaps the super-collector's edition will encourage you to dig deep into your bank account. Dubbed the Prestige Edition, this gigantic pack includes everything you can expect from the "regular" collector's edition (tin casing, game disc, manual and artwork book) as well as a real, fully-functional set of *MW2*/Infinity Ward-branded night vision goggles (or NVGs, which we're going to start calling them from now on). Best of all, when you finally figure out that your nifty NVGs will in fact hamper your gaming performance, the pack also includes a more or less full-size "Soap" MacTavish head sculpt on which you can keep your NVGs. When not in use, Soap will happily sit on your desk for the sole purpose of providing that uneasy feeling that someone's watching you.

TEAM17 IS PLAYING IT SAFE

Following their (hopefully brief) exploration into the adventure game genre with *Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust*, Team17 is preparing to settle down and return to their roots with *Alien Breed Evolution* – a "retro-modern" remake of the game that helped Team17 climb onto the Amiga platform 18 years ago. While few solid details have emerged, the majority of gameplay from the original title will remain the same – two player co-op, top-down killing, loads of weapons and a ton of aliens that like to eat people. If it's anything like the original, it'll be a blast, and this new, very slick-looking Unreal Engine 3-powered remake looks set to do the brand proud and hopefully win Team17 back a few brownie points from the community.

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DP2733/E/NAG





Business as usual



The Old Warhammer Republic?

Not being the type to miss any potential money-making opportunity, Electronic Arts has decided to merge two of its key RPG development studios – BioWare (*Mass Effect* and the upcoming *Star Wars: The Old Republic*) and Mythic Entertainment (*Dark Age of Camelot*, *Warhammer Online*). Additionally, Mark Jacobs, co-founder and general manager of Mythic, will be leaving the studio. Ray Muzyka has been appointed as general manager of this new group that will have a focus on RPGs and MMORPGs. According to Muzyka, "It's a collaboration opportunity. Each of the groups continues to make the same thing in their [own locations]. But it's fuelling and enabling more communication, collaboration, best practice sharing, encouraging each other to play each others' games – but no formal change per se in what anybody's doing."

While both studios will continue to operate individually for a large portion of their work, EA has confirmed that Mythic will now be involved in the development of *SW: ToR*, as well as other future co-development in other titles. BioWare officer Dr Greg Zeschuk said, "...we can probably bring perspectives to the table that will be new and perhaps helpful to the guys from Mythic in the same way from an online perspective they can certainly share with us."

Midway picked up at last

It's been a long, steady decline for Midway Games, creators of the *Mortal Kombat* series; a decline that is finally drawing to an end. In a recent auction, entered only by Warner Bros., the studio was handed over to Warner with the hopes and dreams of landing on its feet after all the financial turmoil it has faced over recent years. The sale has now been cleared by the courts and WB has wasted no time carving up the publisher. WB will officially take over the entire *Mortal Kombat* and *This is Vegas* licences, all Midway Sports and arcade brands and the company's Chicago and Seattle studios. By default, Midway's NewCastle (*Wheelman*) and San Diego studios have received 60-day notices of closure if WB (or anyone else) decides not to pick them up along with the rest of the company. A WB spokesman has told the press that it's "entirely possible" that these stragglers will too be bought, but there are no promises at this time. Development on *Mortal Kombat 9* will continue on schedule.

identity crisis

FPS pioneers join with RPG gurus

GAME DEVELOPMENT STUDIOS CHANGE hands all the time, but it's usually a matter of large publishers eating up the little guys, rebranding them and having them churn out nine sequels of "that one hit title of theirs" within the space of a decade. One particular studio has been in the sights of big publishers like EA and Activision for some time, but has never made the move over to complete ownership, until now. id Software, the creators of *Doom*, *Quake* and the upcoming *Rage*, has officially crossed over, but rather than sell out to the mega-corporations, has surprisingly been bought by ZeniMax Media – the same company that owns Bethesda Softworks (*Elder Scrolls* developers). The teams won't be merged entirely, however, instead maintaining their own unique talents and personalities for the foreseeable future, and both will continue to work on current projects with only a minimum of cooperation. EA will remain the publisher of *Rage*, but we'll likely see ZeniMax take over the bulk of any future publishing.

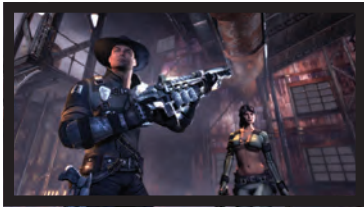
Robert Altman, ZeniMax CEO comments, "It has been a part of our strategic plan for a long time to be expanding the numbers of titles that we will be releasing. Part of that is done through external development. At E3, for example, this year we announced that we are going to be publishing a game called *Brink* from Splash Damage. We're

gonna be doing a game called *Wet* from A2M. So we have been expanding beyond just the titles that Bethesda has created internally. And we are also increasing the internal capabilities at Bethesda. But beyond that we are looking at other studios that might join together with us and at the top of our list, the most prized and most desired from our perspective, was id Software, for all the obvious reasons."

When asked to elaborate on the reasoning behind the acquisition, id Software technical director John Carmack had plenty to say. "We've had offers since before *Wolfenstein* was even published. The original one. And over the years we've just always thought that we placed a lot of value on our complete independence. It's nice for me to be able to personally do whatever the heck I feel like, whether I think that I can justify it exactly in business concerns or not. But the landscape's changed a lot over 15 or 20 years and the stakes are so high now, when it costs tens of millions of dollars to make a game, and then the marketing budgets are tens of millions of dollars more. And the game's [development] take place over the space of four years. We knew that were gonna have to start making some changes and we had started the process of building up a second team so we could pipeline and share resources a little bit better and cover up over any mistakes."

NAMCO BANDAI TAKES OVER ATARI

Following its purchase of 34% of Atari in May, Namco Bandai has now bought another large chunk of the company and completely swallowed Atari's distribution responsibilities in all PAL regions. Atari, which was previously charged with distribution of videogames in 50 countries across the world, will now be reduced to a US-only brand under current CEO David Gardner. Namco Bandai has renamed its operation to Namco Bandai Partners. CEO Jackie Fromion said, "We are very excited about working with all our valued partners in retail, media and publishing to grow what is already a successful distribution business even further as part of the Namco Bandai Games family."



Damnation devs laid off

Damnation, the steampunk "Gears of War meets *Bravestarr*" title from former indie developers Blue Omega, has been a bit of a let-down for publisher Codemasters, it seems. According to a number of developers at Blue Omega, the entire development team has been sacked following a bout of recent spats between sub-contractors, as well as *Damnation*'s relatively poor performance in the charts. The developers aren't leaving it at that, however, and have returned fire with complaints including their dismay at being taken off development of their own title. There's even talk of a few law suits doing the rounds regarding the apparently poor quality of work from the last-minute replacement team (which is unnamed at the moment). This is certainly not a pleasant way for an indie developer to experience their first taste of the corporate world, but at least they'll learn a few lessons.

Pirate Bay purchased

It's not every day that one of the top 100 Internet sites in the world trades hands for a "mere" \$8 million, but that's exactly what happened with the notorious torrent tracker The Pirate Bay. Following the recent court case and subsequent conviction, TPB owners have evidently been listening to offers for a complete buy-out. Swedish advertisement and software provider Global Gaming Factory X was the lucky purchaser, and will complete the acquisition by the end of August. Just what does the company have in store for the biggest piracy Website in the world? Their plan is to completely legitimise the business by providing compensation to suppliers while maintaining the torrent distribution system. GGF stated that they "would like to introduce models which entail that content providers and copyright owners get paid for content that is downloaded via the site."

Hans Pandeya of GGF explains, "In order to live on, The Pirate Bay requires a new business model which satisfies the requirements and needs of all parties, content providers, broadband operators, end users, and the judiciary. Content creators and providers need to control their content and get paid for it. File sharers' need faster downloads and better quality."

They said it...

"If I told you that you would be standing on **an oversized bathroom scale, and having fun doing it, you probably would have said, 'Reggie, I don't get it.'** And yet here we are with the Balance Board arguably as the third largest development platform across the globe."

Reggie Fils-Aime,
CEO of Nintendo of America

"Hopefully last year is as bad as it gets. I think all indicators are that 2009 is going better than 2008... **my hope is that as our production efficiencies improve and more great games come to market, the horizon has got to be better for 2009 and 2010.**"

Jack Tretton, president of SCE

"I don't think peripherals are taking over the gaming market. **There are games like *Modern Warfare 2* that don't require a peripheral** and perhaps a peripheral would get in the way."

Mike Griffith,
CEO and president of Activision

"I always thought that someday I could make a game that has a story and no cut-scenes, but it wasn't appropriate for *Brütal Legend*, which has an epic story plot. **I feel like as long as it's entertaining and you don't feel like skipping them,** in the end games are just entertainment, so however you're entertaining people."

Tim Schafer,
head of Double Fine Productions

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D92733/E/NAG





DDO goes free to play

Now you can level-grind on a budget!

DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS ONLINE'S upcoming expansion, *Eberron Unlimited*, brings with it all the usual goodies one would expect from an MMO expansion, with one particular point to set it apart from the rest – its arrival will mark *D&D Online* as a completely free MMORPG. That's right, what once cost monthly fees and a retail purchase will now (as of 6 August) be absolutely free. In addition to that, *Eberron Unlimited* raises the character level cap to the natural *D&D* limit of 20, adds a new class, new equipment and more quests for both low and high level characters. As is often the case with such freebies, players will be able to purchase additional equipment and the like with real world money, but there's still an entire game awaiting free

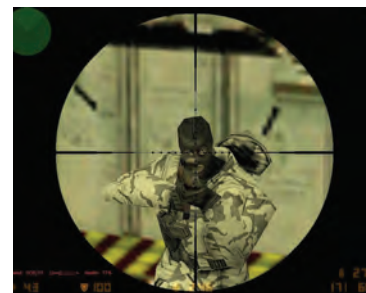
players with no obligation to purchase. It might be worth mentioning this odd tidbit, however, as taken from the DDO Website:

"Free content is widely available for low-level characters and becomes sparser as a character's level increases. However, additional premium adventure packs are available for purchase through the DDO Store. Once the adventure pack has been added to your account, it will be permanently available to all your characters."

...Which makes this a bit of a mixed bag. Still, if you've got the time and bandwidth to spare, there's no reason not to download the client and peruse the game for free, then perhaps decide later if this is really your thing. Visit www.ddo.com for more information.

INSERT SHAMELESS MJ JOKE HERE

Don't pretend that you didn't see this one coming. According to MJJ Productions, Michael Jackson's production studio, there has been a new MJ game in production for "several months", and hasn't just been slapped together at the last minute following the pop icon's recent death. The game will supposedly feature Jackson's likeness as well as many lines of recorded speech. "I am sure it will still be released," an MJJ Productions rep is quoted as saying. "Michael loved games." We can supposedly expect the title by December.



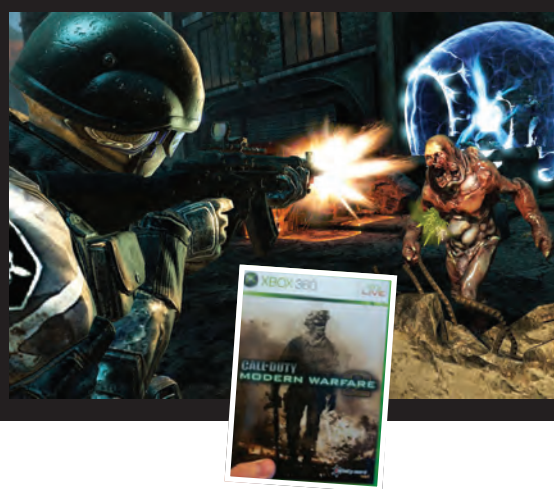
Germans continue the war against gaming

If there's one thing the German government loves doing, it's making life difficult for their gamers. While countless bans of violent games in the country are nothing new, two recent announcements by the German Parliament have left a sour taste in the mouths of not only local gamers, but game developers too. First, is a declaration that prohibits the playing of *Counter-Strike* at all public LAN events, including tournament LANs and gaming cafes, which has resulted in the cancellation of numerous ESL Friday Night games and the Convention-X-Treme tournament. After a few failed attempts, the organisers of CXT have finally met with those behind of this decision and are moving forward with their discussions, but it looks like it'll be some time before a positive resolution is reached.

Next up, and likely more damning for the industry, is the proposed ban on the playing and production of all violent videogames – the criteria being any game that includes deadly violence or cruelty. As most of you should realise, that makes up for a good chunk of games available to the mature market and will almost certainly put a damper on things over at Crytek – likely forcing them to outsource all production of future titles or simply relocate (we're sure neighbouring Austria will be only too happy to take them on board). The government is hoping to have this new law passed and in place by 27 September.

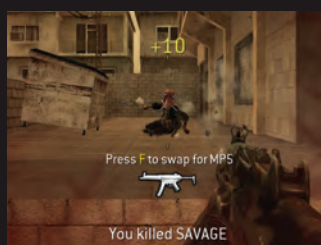
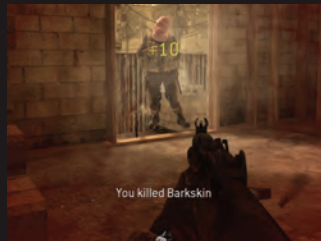
Singularity frozen in time

When it comes to the Christmas madness that affects the gaming industry every year, and particularly during the economic downturn facing the entire world, it's clear that there's only so much limelight available to the big-name games. EA has already stated that they felt *Mirror's Edge* and *Dead Space* were too cramped in the market, and now Activision has realised that it, too, shouldn't crowd its titles too close together, either. Such is the fate of upcoming sci-fi FPS *Singularity*, which will see players in control of a powerful time-manipulation device that can target individual objects and structures to accelerate or reverse the effects of aging in an instant. Instead, this classy-looking title has been bumped down to a Q1 (likely March) 2010 release so Activision can give *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* plenty of space to take over the shelves this holiday season. On a side-note, according to a Tweet by Infinity Ward employee Robert Bowling, the "Call of Duty" part of the title will return; apparently Activision figured the brand was too strong to let go. We picture a couple of tantrums about this over at Infinity Ward HQ.





Evolution of AN ASS WHOOPIN'



Funcom wants you (back)

If you've previously purchased *Age of Conan* and perhaps found the game a little lacking, Funcom wants you to give it another chance. Any previous subscriber with a currently inactive account is now eligible for two weeks of game time absolutely free. So, why should you bother with this offer? The developers have a few ideas. "Since launching last year, *Age of Conan* has been lovingly improved by a dedicated development team who has launched several major updates to the game. These updates have all added a wealth of new content such as the massive outdoor area of the giants known as Ymir's Pass, the huge dungeon Xibaluku, and the vast new cityscape of Tarantia Commons among others. All of these areas have added countless hours of adventure through new quests, enemies, and rewards. New features have also been implemented such as an extensive player vs. player notoriety system that allows players to become murderers and hunt each other down for exclusive rewards, improved DirectX 10 graphics technology that allows for some spectacular visuals, and a massive revitalization of the core role-playing system."

Left 4 Dead: Raccoon City

It's about time too. The *Left 4 Dead* authoring tools have been out for over a month now, and creator "Outatime" has taken it upon himself to give *Left 4 Dead* what it deserves: *Resident Evil* Flavour. Outatime is creating an entire *L4D* campaign, based on the series favourite and cornerstone of the zombie-game genre, *Resident Evil* 3: it's locations, themes and zombie-filled corridors. One map has already been unveiled and released in beta status: Raccoon City. The map is huge with twists, turns and a very awesome recreation of the Raccoon City Police Department. You can check out the map (framerate issues exist, since it's beta), here: <http://l4dmaps.com/details.php?file=48#screenvideo>

ESCAPE THE JOB FROM HELL

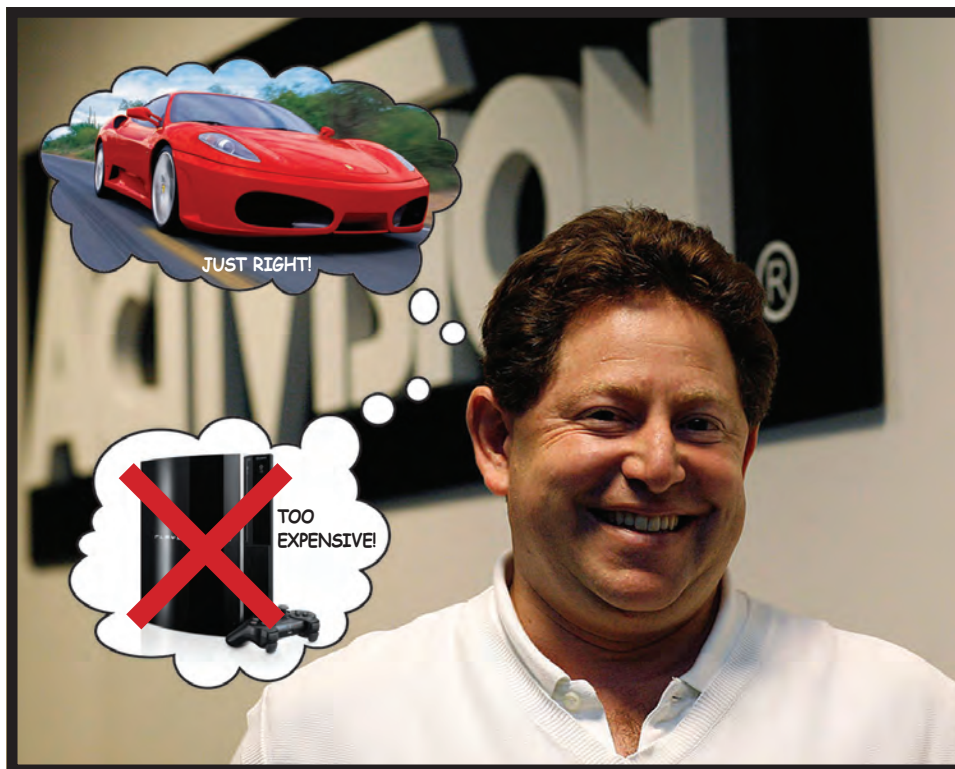
Fight your way up the corporate ladder!



Log onto
www.saica.co.za/escape
to WIN CASH!

Visit www.saica.co.za/escape to play
the 'Escape the Job from Hell'
online game and
hook up with a cool future.

D92733/E/NAG



Peter Moore sasses Obama

During a speech to the American Medical Association, President of America-Land Barack Obama urged parents to get their kids to "step away from the videogames and spend more time playing outside," in an effort to encourage good health. Ever quick to capitalise on an opportunity, EA's Peter Moore blogged [<http://itsinthegame.ea.com/>] a response to the president: "As a father of three and someone who spends many a morning or lunch hour out on a run and/or in the gym, I applaud the President urging Americans to get off the couch and get active. Of course, I can't resist pointing out that while I've always wholeheartedly endorsed moderation in anything you do, including playing games, it may be time for the President and his family to put their Wii to good use and fire up the 30-Day Challenge with *EA Sports Active*. This is a 'game' even the President may not want to 'step away' from," said Moore. We think Obama and Moore should take it to *Fight Night Round 4*, where you can already download a user-created recreation of Obama to use as a boxer.



World of SimCityCraft

It's time for city building sims to jump on the MMO train with *Cities XL*. Previously entitled *Cities Unlimited*, *XL* will have all the usual city building objectives and tools but will throw everything into the blender by putting these cities on a persistent planet with thousands of other player-controlled cities. Players will be able to choose from 20 different landscapes [there's no mention of randomised terrain] and will build their perfect metropolis from the ground up, managing transport and other infrastructure in much the same way as they're used to by now. They'll also be able to create an in-game avatar and engage in trade and social networking with other players in the world.

Money talks

Activision "might have to stop supporting Sony"

ACTIVISION IS WAGGING ITS finger at Sony, threatening to stop making games for the PS3 and PSP unless Sony lowers the price on their consoles. Sony doesn't care what Activision says, dismissing it as posturing. BioWare says Activision is just being mean. Let's watch the fun:

"They have to cut the price, because if they don't, the attach rates [the number of games each console owner buys] are likely to slow. If we are being realistic, we might have to stop supporting Sony," said Activision CEO Bobby Kotick to *The Times*. "When we look at 2010 and 2011, we might want to consider if we support the console — and the PSP [portable] too."

Kotick added: "I'm getting concerned about Sony; the PlayStation 3 is losing a bit of momentum and they don't make it easy for me to support the platform. It's expensive to develop for the console, and the Wii and the Xbox are just selling better. Games generate a better return on invested capital on the Xbox than on the PlayStation."

Howard Stringer, Chairman and Chief

Executive Officer of Sony Corporation of America, thinks Kotick is all talk: "He likes to make a lot of noise," Stringer said at the Allen & Company Sun Valley Conference. "He's putting pressure on me and I'm putting pressure on him. That's the nature of business." If Sony dropped the price of the PS3 as Kotick wishes, Stringer says "I would lose money on every PlayStation I make, how's that for logic?"

According to Sony CFO Nobuaki Oneda, Sony is currently losing money on every PlayStation they make, around \$100 per system.

Coming to Sony's aid is Greg Zeschuk, co-founder of BioWare, who calls Activision's comments "silly". Talking to CVG, Zeschuk says, "I don't think it's really fair to poke fun at Sony. Certainly the Wii's been a massive success and Sony's probably not going as fast as they thought it would be but I think that they're starting to make the right moves and the software's coming along." BioWare is currently in partnership with Microsoft.

Red Faction DLC out soon

If you've spent the necessary hours destroying every single structure on the Martian surface, you'll be pleased to know there will soon be a whole new game world to explore and destroy in the first upcoming DLC for *Red Faction: Guerrilla* entitled *Demons of the Badlands*. *Demons* will see players leaving the boundaries of the main game with a standalone story arc set in an all-new area of Mars. *Demons* is the first of three scheduled DLC packs for RF: G and should be available by time you read this, and will cost 800MS Points or roughly R80 on the PSN.

WII EMULATOR WITH HD

As much as gamers have come to accept the Nintendo Wii's graphical limitations, it's hard to not wonder just how much better the games could look in HD. The Dolphin emulator does so much more than simply allow games to be rendered in 720p, however, but breaks the norm for emulation development by being a highly-capable emulator that exists while the system it emulates is still hot on the market. Dolphin obviously still has its problems, as it always the case with emulators, but the developers claim that *Super Mario Galaxy* is completely playable, with audio, along with *Zelda Wind Walker*. The system is also capable of playing Gamecube titles. Visit www.dolphin-emu.com for further details.

Gaming Charts

Look & Listen
DVD • CD • GAMES • MP3 • ACCESSORIES

LOOK & LISTEN RECOMMENDS...



May 2009 figures provided by GfK
www.gfksa.co.za

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Fight Night Round 4
- 2 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10
- 3 Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen
- 4 inFAMOUS
- 5 UFC 2009 Undisputed

XBOX 360

- 1 Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen
- 2 Fight Night Round 4
- 3 PROTOTYPE
- 4 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10
- 5 Red Faction: Guerrilla

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen
- 2 Ice Age 3: Dawn of the Dinosaurs
- 3 Monsters vs. Aliens
- 4 Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings
- 5 X-Men Origins: Wolverine

PC

- 1 The Sims 3
- 2 Spore Galactic Adventures
- 3 Wolfenstein
- 4 Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood
- 5 Overlord II

PSP

- 1 Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen
- 2 Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince
- 3 Ben 10: Alien Force
- 4 SBK 09: Superbike World Championship
- 5 Rock Band: Unplugged

WII

- 1 Wii Sports Resort + Wii MotionPlus
- 2 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10
- 3 Grand Slam Tennis
- 4 Virtua Tennis 2009
- 5 Ashes Cricket 2009

DS

- 1 Ice Age 3: Dawn of the Dinosaurs
- 2 Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day!
- 3 Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen
- 4 Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince
- 5 Pokémon Ranger

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Destroy All Humans! Path of the Furon
- 2 FIFA 09
- 3 X-Men Origins: Wolverine
- 4 Resident Evil 5
- 5 Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

XBOX 360

- 1 Project Gotham Racing 3
- 2 Crackdown
- 3 Guitar Hero World Tour - Super Bundle
- 4 Trivial Pursuit
- 5 Burnout Paradise: The Ultimate Box

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 X-Men Origins: Wolverine
- 2 Ben 10: Alien Force
- 3 Grand Theft Auto: Vice City
- 4 Grand Theft Auto III
- 5 FIFA 08

PC

- 1 FIFA 07
- 2 Need for Speed: Most Wanted
- 3 Battlefield 2142
- 4 Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood
- 5 World of Warcraft - Pre-paid Card Games

PSP

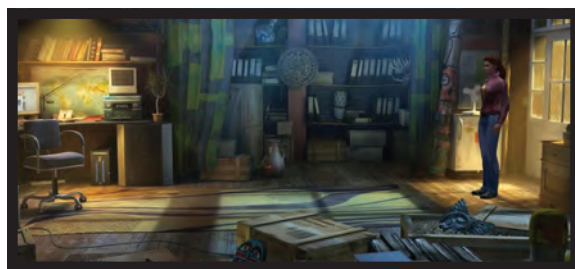
- 1 Grand Theft Auto: Vice City
- 2 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 3 Burnout Legends
- 4 Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories
- 5 X-Men Origins: Wolverine

WII

- 1 Wii Fit + Balance Board
- 2 Mario Kart + Wheel
- 3 EA Sports Active
- 4 WarioWare: Smooth Moves
- 5 Super Mario Galaxy

DS

- 1 Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day
- 2 New Super Mario Bros.
- 3 Hannah Montana: The Movie
- 4 Ben 10: Protector of Earth
- 5 Monsters vs. Aliens



New PnC adventure from Tunguska creators

If you're a fan of point 'n' click adventure games, you're no-doubt aware that finding a new game worth playing in this genre can be a challenge. Thankfully, Animation Arts, the team behind *Secret Files: Tunguska* and its sequel, *Puritas Cordis*, are back on the job following the welcome reception *Secret Files* achieved. Publisher Deep Silver is completely running the show this time. The game will take place in the 1930s; the Nazis are on the prowl for anything occult to help them further the war effort. Players take on the role of former British soldier and smuggler Fenton Paddock who's been cast into the role of tour guide in the Tibetan mountains. There he discovers what his employers are up to and begins an epic adventure across three continents.

NEXT RE FILM ON ITS WAY?

Reports are flooding in from the rumour mill that Mila Jovovich has signed on for another *Resident Evil* film, with shooting supposedly set to begin at the end of the year. Unfortunately, details are scarce but some sources claim the film will be called *Resident Evil: Afterlife*. Director Paul W.S. Anderson, the man behind the other *RE* films as well as *Wanted* and *Death Race*, is reportedly returning.

Blu-ray

For the Fans



Ghostbusters
Available from the 3rd Aug

R299⁹⁹



The Departed
Available from the 10th Aug

R299⁹⁹



The Prestige
Available from the 10th Aug

R299⁹⁹



The Fast And The Furious
Available from the 10th Aug

R299⁹⁹



Batman
Available from the 17th Aug

R299⁹⁹



Batman Returns
Available from the 17th Aug

R299⁹⁹

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No Splinter Cell: Conviction for PS3

"SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION is a true Microsoft exclusive title and there are no plans to have *Splinter Cell: Conviction* on other platforms," Ubisoft has gone on record to say. Now you may be thinking to yourself, "how many times have we heard that before, only to see the game released on other platforms later?" Ubisoft would like to tell you, it's not going to happen.

"There are several reasons behind this choice. First of all, *Splinter Cell* games are historically linked with Microsoft platforms. The first *Splinter Cell* on the original Xbox was one of the first games to fully exploit the console's technical

possibilities. At that time, Microsoft really believed in the game potential and provided strong support to promote it."

Ubisoft also got a little sappy, saying: "So, there is a 'link of heart' between the franchise and the platform. Some games are like this [think of *Final Fantasy* for instance]. The second reason behind this choice is purely linked to production," it continued. "Having a single target platform means that we can optimize the game even further, because we only have one type of – console – hardware to support."

And there you have it.

GEARBOX FLAPS MOUTH

Leader of game developer Gearbox, Randy Pitchford, likes what Bungie and Infinity Ward have done with *Halo* and *Modern Warfare* respectively, but wants more. "I keep waiting to hear what Bungie is going to do that's not *Halo*," he said. "Those guys are amazing, right? They walk on water! And the same with Infinity Ward. It's like, dude I'm totally psyched to get my *Call of Duty* fix every year, but you guys are amazing! What else have you got? Can you give me something I haven't seen before?" At least Pitchford understands why Bungie and Infinity Ward keep doing what makes them insane amounts of money: "The folks that are innovating need to be rewarded so that the folks that are making big bets can take that risk." Right on: now finish *Borderlands* already!

EA "doesn't understand" Syndicate, says creator

The original *Syndicate* was a masterpiece. Released on PC in 1993, you controlled a group of cyborg agents in a gritty cyberpunk world quasi-RTS style. Its creator, Sean Cooper, is sceptical of EA's long-rumoured sequel will ever happen. Last year, EA revealed they would resuscitate the franchise, saying Starbreeze studio would be handling it. Speaking with IncGamers, Cooper fears that any EA sequel will miss the point of the original.

"Every time I've seen a prototype of a new *Syndicate* it's just been misguided," he said. "They've tried to be too quirky. They've tried to do things that aren't what the essence of the

game was." While at EA, Cooper claims he saw a few demo builds of a new *Syndicate*, but was unimpressed.

"One of [the prototypes] ... it was something about using different senses. Something was leaving a scent and the agents were following it. I remember seeing them demo it in a conference room and thinking 'what are they trying to achieve? what are they doing?'. The essence of the game was killing people – and that was it," he said. "Big guns. Strong dudes. Terminators essentially. If I have to kill everyone, I will. That to me was the essence of the gameplay."

We have faith in Starbreeze though. Time will tell.



THE BAGINATOR

So we all know the history of the poor badger, stomped by a demon and then resurrected, lost to the Internet torrents, only to return as the Dread Pirate Badger. All of this left him with a peg leg, an eyepatch and a healthy respect for demons.

And so his story continues...

On the weekends, the badger likes to run free in the long savannah grass near the highway by the airport. Often he dashes across the road (you know... to get to the other side). The peg leg and eyepatch have robbed him of his usual nimbleness. Too bad he didn't spot that truck carrying cybernetic body parts, which was luckily followed by an ambulance full of cybernetic doctors and scientists, which was luckily followed by a military jeep on its way to Vicinity 42 in Kempton Park (they do advanced experiments here in an underground lab). They worked for days on the battered remains of our poor badger and finally produced what you see on this page. He's still hiding (they wanted to use him for nefarious purposes) in the magazine – go get him. Remember, it's not going to be easy anymore – he's more advanced.

Send your sightings to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line 'August Badger' and stand a chance to win a 2009 Guinness World Records Gamers Edition book sponsored by Pan MacMillan Publishers.

LAST MONTH'S WINNER

Alexander Bossi, p61



BL
GAMES™

WE'RE EXPANDING

OPENING SOON

MENLYN PARK SHOPPING MALL
PRETORIA

01 AUGUST 2009

Shop UF8,
Menlyn Park Shopping Mall,
Cnr, Atterbury Rd. & Lois Ave., Menlo
Park, Pretoria.

Caption of the Month

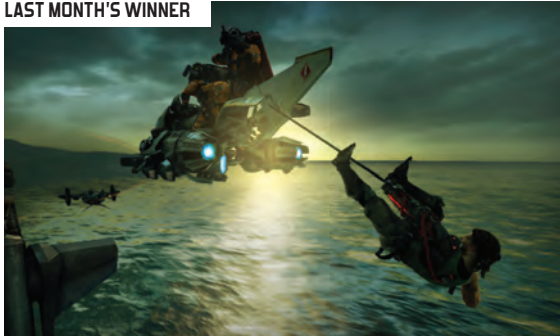
Every month we'll choose a screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better caption. The winner will get a Gamers Gear T-shirt. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line [August Caption].

THIS MONTH'S CONTEST



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR:
"Pull over! Your headlight isn't working!"

LAST MONTH'S WINNER



"You WILL pay for that petrol sir!"
– Christof

JULY WINNER



"Look man I usually wear pants you hear! Don't ask and no wise cracks or else this will be the last crack you see right!"
– Mark Muller

Events

MAGIC THE GATHERING

NOVVA'S FRIDAY NIGHT MAGIC

When: Every Friday
Time: 19:00
Type: Standard, Deck Constructed
Cost: R30
novvagaming.co.za

MID-MONTH MADNESS 2-HEADED GIANT

When: 15 August
Time: 13:00
Type: Standard, Deck Constructed, Team
Cost: R30 per player
novvagaming.co.za

MAGIC GAME DAY

When: 15 August
Time: 12:00
Where: Birchwood Hotel and Conference Centre
jelena@blowfishentertainment.co.za

LANs

NOVVA LAN

When: 1 August
Frequency: Monthly
Where: Novva Gaming
Type: Open LAN
novvagaming.co.za

GET WIRED LAN

When: 29 August
Time: 20:00-06:00
Where: New Internet Cafe, 140 Main Road, Somerset West
021 850 0131

FRAGARENA

When: 31 July
Where: Pretoria
Type: Open LAN
Max Players: 200
langames.co.za

HEROCLIX

TOURNAMENTS

Frequency: Monthly
Where: Novva Gaming. Contact us for more info.
novvagaming@gmail.com
novvagaming.co.za

bt GAMES™ Release List

Release dates subject to change

WEEK 1 – 7 AUGUST

TITLE	PLATFORMS
No releases	

WEEK 2 – 14 AUGUST

TITLE	PLATFORMS
Ashes Cricket 2009	PC, PS3, 360
Wolfenstein	PC, PS3, 360
Madden NFL 10	PS3, 360

WEEK 3 – 21 AUGUST

TITLE	PLATFORMS
The King of Fighters XII	PS3, 360
Batman: Arkham Asylum	PC, PS3, 360

WEEK 4 – 28 AUGUST

TITLE	PLATFORMS
MySims Racing	WII, DS
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10	PS2, PS3, PSP, WII, 360

WEEK 5 – 31 JULY

TITLE	PLATFORMS
No releases	



Batman: Arkham Asylum

BOARDWALK INKWAZI MALL
RICHARDS BAY

01 SEPTEMBER 2009

Shop L55,
Kruger Rand Road,
Richards Bay

EASTGATE SHOPPING CENTRE
JOHANNESBURG

01 OCTOBER 2009

U94, Upper Level,
Bradford Road,
Bedfordview

CANAL WALK
CAPE TOWN

01 NOVEMBER 2009

Shop 90A,
Century Boulevard,
Century City, Cape Town

RIVERSIDE MALL
NELSPRUIT

COMING 2010



MIKTAR'S INTERFERINGS

BY MIKTAR DRACON

Happily Drowning In 'Data-space'

UP UNTIL RECENT YEARS, biofeedback has been the realm of sports athletes and horses. The athletes and equines are hooked up to expensive machines that chart the various processes inside the body. Using the feedback to gain a better awareness of the inner-workings of the body, the athlete (or horse trainer) can slowly learn to exert conscious control over things like heart rate or blood pressure. The obvious benefit is that with greater control comes improved fitness. For the geeks out there, biofeedback is really all about 'min-maxing' the system.

When you first start playing games, there is an important disambiguation to learn: separating 'self' from 'virtual self'. We've all done it: played a racing game and leaned into corners with our bodies, twisting the controller as if we're under the effects of G-forces that aren't there. We've jumped when making Mario jump. Every gamer has some embarrassing memory locked away from when they were still a young nugget, a noob of the first order – the idea that Button 'A' equals Jump, initially 'maps as a function' that is still tied to our own bodies. By paying attention to what's going on inside the game and with our own bodies, we learn to not physically do what we want our characters to do, translated through our hands to a gamepad. That's a **biofeedback loop**. We literally rewrite our own brain 'software' on the fly, creating an entirely new mapping of functions and abilities. Our brains are incredible.

Recently, I bought *Wii Fit*. It's been selling like crazy, and I found it hard to believe it was either that good, or that so many people are interested in fitness. After all, who sticks to their gym routine?

However, gamers are a new generation spread across many generations. Gamers, be they hardcore, core or expanded (more on that in the future), all expect different things from the interactive components in their lives. My gym was boring: a bunch of meatheads all doing the same things over and over – boring things that had no real immediate feedback. *Wii Fit* has immediate feedback. The instant that little dot appeared on screen, showing my centre of balance in real time, a biofeedback loop was established in my brain. Here was the visible representation of my entire core muscle group working to make that dot be where it is, or in the case of the Fitness Tests, to move it to where it needed to be.

Wii Fit is a simple idea, using a simple piece of hardware, very elegantly. The end result is 'game' software that involves you in a 'gamer' kind of way, making you move this way and that, step on, step off, balance, wiggle, sway and run in a variety of exercises and mini games. It tracks everything, from your Body Mass Index

to your Weight, to how many minutes you exercise on which days: everything becomes a graph. Over enough time, graphs start to reveal information about your physical body that you didn't know.

That kind of biofeedback, tracked and charted over time, is so utterly powerful; it amazes me that gyms don't incorporate it into their already overpriced machinery. Admittedly, my biofeedback chart fetish didn't start with *Wii Fit*, but rather a small iPod touch application called *WeightBot*. It's a simple program. Every day, you enter your weight. It beeps happily, and starts charting your daily, weekly, monthly and yearly graphs. It even adds in an 'averaging' line, which smoothes out the rapid changes in weight our bodies naturally go through. Once I started entering my weight daily, I didn't want to break the chain. It's geeky, but I thought of it as a Combo Chain. The longer I could keep the chain going, the better. Later, with *Wii Fit*, the same Gamer Instinct kicked in. The addition of High Score charts for each *Wii Fit* exercise and game, yet another appealing facet to the whole thing.

So, today I got *Personal Trainer: Walking* for the Nintendo DS. It comes with two pedometers (a device that tracks your walking). Walking is a big part of my life, so I figured why not: I may as well get scored for it. *PT: Walking* includes global high-score lists and mini-competitions between people.

Perhaps it's just me, but I like the idea of trying to make life more like a game. Why shouldn't life be more like a game? In the future, when you can buy sunglasses that overlay a 'data-space' across your vision, visually representing your own body processes to you in easy-to-understand pictographs, not to mention rendering in real time an augmented reality that gives you a greater informational density awareness of your surroundings, I'll be the first in line to get one.

Is Nintendo onto something with their Vitality Sensor? Who knows? **NAG**

PS: Watch the anime *Dennou Coil* – it's related to 'data-space' and augmented reality.

When you first start playing games, **there is an important disambiguation to learn:** separating 'self' from 'virtual self'.

PureActive Scrub*:
specialist in blackhead reduction,
and the marks they leave behind.

NEW

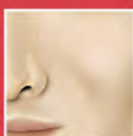
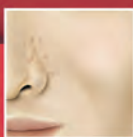
GARNIER PUREACTIVE SCRUB

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RESULTS FROM DAY1**

- 94%** of people tested agree that blackheads are visibly reduced.
- 90%** of people tested agree that marks due to imperfections are visibly reduced.



*by Garnier
**Auto-evaluation on 52 people after 4 weeks.



Take care.
GARNIER



BY MIKLÓS SZECSEI

Post E3 Glow

ANOTHER E3 HAS COME and gone, and with it a nimiety of things to look forward to, corporate bragging and big announcements that leave gamers in something resembling a post-orgasmic state. I am ecstatic that E3 was back to normal this year; I abhorred 2007 when they decided to make it all low-key and pretentiously "invite only." Sure, it can at times degenerate into corporate one-upmanship, but those couple of days are like some sort of gaming Christmas, just without the obligatory family visits and expensive present swapping.

E3 is the platform for making big announcements and reveals, and Microsoft certainly made the most of this with its Project Natal. As with all new console peripherals, however, it's not the technology that matters, but rather how that technology is applied to the games we play. There were many tech-demo games shown at Natal's debut, but they seemed more like explanatory gimmicks than actual games worth playing. It was *Milo and Kate* that revealed the true potential that this new peripheral has.

One thing I aver is that had it not been for the *Milo and Kate* presentation, then Natal would have come off as Microsoft's rehashing of Sony's PlayStation Eye. *Milo and Kate* is Peter Molyneux's latest brainchild (how apt), and he made it clear that this is Lionhead Studios' new game they are currently working on. The game utilises Natal's face-and-voice recognition technology to allow players to interact with the eponymous virtual child and his dog, Kate. Interactions revealed so far include having conversations and doing various activities such as drawing and fishing. Granted, those activities weren't particularly earth shattering, but the conversational moments were uncanny. Molyneux emphasises (in his trademarked enthusiastic gushing) that the real premise of the title is to allow players to engage with the artificial child on an emotional level. The potential for this was already seen in the brief demo and can also be read in reports written by those who've had hands-on time. Greeting Milo as you would any real human being results in him greeting you back and calling you by your own name (I'm assuming the game will come with a collection of recognised names for Milo to call players by, in which case I'm screwed*). Having Milo continue the conversation by, for example, complimenting you on your shirt colour, escalates the believability of the encounter and helps create a sense of connection. There is no way that the emotional connection Molyneux is going for could be attained through the standard Xbox 360 controller. For this to work, players need to interact with Milo in the same way they would with any real human being, and it is Project Natal that allows that.

Lionhead Studios has, according to Molyneux, been working towards a project such as *Milo and Kate* for many years now,

but it is only since the advent of Natal that Molyneux's goals have become reality. And the signposts are quite readily seen in previous Lionhead titles: the learning AI in the creatures from the *Black & White* series; and the "emotional connection" with the dog from *Fable II*. It seems then, that *Milo and Kate* is a combination of past Lionhead programming and concepts, which can now be brought to life thanks to today's technology.

I have to admit that the brief clip demoed at E3 had me enraptured. Since this is Molyneux's baby, however, my initial, giddy amazement has been toned down to 'cautiously optimistic'. The concept is fascinating nonetheless; there has never been this level of interaction with an artificial character since... ever, really. During demos and interviews, Molyneux was quick to point out that *Milo and Kate* utilises a few tricks in order to aid the creation of a perceived connection. As long as the tricks are not obvious, then they won't be jarring enough to break the appearance of true interaction.

My inner, excitable geek has me frothing at the mouth in response to this new level of interaction, but the cynical realist in me has a leash firmly attached to said geek. The prospect of being able to interact with virtual people like this is mind boggling for the future of gaming. Rather than a gimmicky new means of controlling an in-game skateboard, Project Natal will hopefully become a means to connect to our beloved, virtual worlds in the most immersive of ways. If *Milo and Kate* turns out to be a success, then Molyneux may have helped usher in a new way of engaging with game characters. Imagine the concept applied to games like *Mass Effect*, which already places a strong emphasis on interacting and communicating with NPC characters. Who knows, maybe in the future when we play as Commander Shephard we really will get to bark orders to our squad. **NAG**

* LOL, Ed

As with all new console peripherals, however, **it's not the technology that matters, but rather how that technology is applied to the games we play.**

anti-spots, anti-marks efficacy.
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Take care.
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COMMAND & CONQUER

IN A CLASSIFIED BRIEFING at a top-secret location, Sam "Lore Master" Bass, Senior Designer and Campaign & Story Lead on *Command & Conquer 4* at EA Los Angeles, answered questions we posed to him, following reports from our agents and spy satellites about a covert facility where a new *Command & Conquer* title is being developed. Early reports suggested that the next generation of the real-time strategy series would be taking off in radically new, and possibly alarming, directions, but the intelligence that Mr Bass provided us with is not only reassuring, but in fact very exciting. Although details about the resource model have not yet been de-classified, other changes not only appear justified, but in fact show much potential. Base mobility will introduce a new way to approach the battlefield, while the fact that a replacement base of operations (Crawler) will be requisitioned when needed, means that combatants will not be eliminated from the game to await the conclusion of the current engagement before being able to participate again. A 'character-building' sort of approach also means that players will have the satisfaction of growing their battlefield capabilities not only over the course of a game, but over a longer term. You can find the particulars in the session transcript, included below.

What made you decide to choose the Tiberium Universe so soon after the last instalment rather than, say, the *Generals* world, which has not been revisited in quite some time? Are there any plans to revisit that particular franchise?

"The Tiberium Universe, being the origin of the *Command & Conquer* series, holds a special place both in our hearts and in those of our fans. As such, returning to that universe was an easy decision for us, and a chance to finish the thread we picked up with *Tiberium Wars*. From a creative standpoint, the core elements of this universe – the clash between GDI and NOD, each fuelled by their own brand of fanaticism, the dichotomy of Tiberium's value versus its terrible cost, the effects of propaganda and dogmatism upon an unstable world – remain both intriguing and relevant to the world as we know it today. Beyond that, working with the Tiberium Universe allows us to emphasize Kane, one of the most iconic characters in video gaming, and one we felt was well worth exploring further.

Beyond the undeniable appeal of the universe as a whole, we were also aware that, while we are proud of the *Tiberium Wars* and *Kane's Wrath* narratives, we also had left many of our fans' questions unanswered, including the biggest mystery of them all: who is Kane, what is he really doing and why? With *C&C4*, we can finally reveal the truth, dig into the reasoning behind Kane's actions, and give our fans the epic conclusion of this storyline they so deserve."

"THE COMMAND & CONQUER 4 STORYLINE BEGINS IN 2062, 15 YEARS AFTER KANE'S SUPPOSED 'DEATH' IN THE TEMPLE PRIME, AS DEPICTED IN TIBERIUM WARS. "



You mentioned “no more campy cinematic sequences.” Does this mean you are abandoning the between-mission live-acted video scenes that have always been such a staple of *Command & Conquer*? Or are you merely changing their directorial angle?

“We are definitely not abandoning our live-action cinematics. They are as much an iconic part of the series as Kane or the GDI Mammoth Tank, and it just wouldn’t feel like *Command & Conquer* without them. That said, in the past, our cinematic sequences have had something of a ‘campy’ element to them, mainly due to technical and production limitations. With the *Red Alert* series providing a home for our sillier inclinations, we felt that the time was ripe to return the core franchise to its roots: a dark, not entirely hopeful vision of the human race struggling to survive in a near future, where the burden and allure of Tiberium have rent society asunder.

To achieve this, we decided to focus on two core goals: the first was to spend significant time developing and iterating on our story, allowing us to create an involving, emotionally compelling narrative. The second, more intimidating task was to investigate the latest film-production technologies and techniques, allowing us to substantially upgrade our visual presentation.

Now, in the midst of production, we can safely say that the end result is a significant improvement over our prior work: a grittier, involving, and significantly more dynamic cinematic style – one that truly places the player at the centre of the story, with real emotional stakes in the outcome of the story. We can’t wait for you to see it.”

You mentioned that this conclusive chapter would have a

“WE ARE DEFINITELY OFFERING A COMPELLING CO-OP MODE FOR C&C 4.”

darker tone. Will we therefore see a move away from the more light-hearted/cartoon-like visuals of *Red Alert 3*? What does this mean in terms of storyline, visuals and overall atmosphere?

“The *Tiberium* series has always told a darker tale than that of the *Red Alert* games, even when limited production values pushed those stories in a campier direction. Rest assured, you’ll certainly never see parachuting War Bears in a game set in the *Tiberium* universe! So, while *C&C4* may seem like a drastic shift in tone when compared with *Red Alert 3*, if you put it next to *Tiberium Wars*, *Tiberian Sun* or even *Generals*, there is definitely a consistency of tone there.

What has changed, more than anything, is a desire on our part to allow the player to question the underlying assumptions of the universe – are GDI really benevolent good guys, or does their approach secretly smack of world government fascism? Does NOD really want to destroy the world, as GDI implies, or are they actually working to advance the cause of those GDI have left behind? And, perhaps most importantly, what are Kane’s motivations?

The *Command & Conquer 4* storyline begins in 2062, 15 years after Kane’s supposed ‘death’ in the Temple Prime, as depicted in *Tiberium Wars*. Tiberium has evolved, spreading so rapidly that the Earth is all but uninhabitable, with humanity teetering on the brink of extinction. Kane emerges from seclusion and offers GDI a solution: the Tiberium Control Network, a Tacitus-derived global network that will allow humanity to tame the alien crystal and harness its power to rebuild what it once destroyed. Knowing that NOD could not construct such a massive project on their own, Kane offers GDI an alliance.

The GDI Council, having no other options, accepts.

We pick up the story a further 15 years later, with the Tiberium Control Network nearing completion and mankind on the cusp of a new golden age. Despite agitation from extremists on both sides, leading to a cold war-style military escalation, the alliance has held strong and the world is at peace. However, with this newfound peace and prosperity comes questions, a growing sense of unease amongst the world's populace about Kane's intentions... and thus our Campaign begins.

Overall, *C&C4* is aiming for a more nuanced, believable feel than our previous titles, with the goal of drawing the Tiberium storyline to a powerful conclusion, and giving our fans the answers they have been hoping for."

Speaking of *Red Alert 3* and the resource model, will *Command & Conquer 4* use the tried-and-tested Tiberium-harvesting model from all three previous titles, or will it make use of an analogue to *Red Alert 3*'s simplified and inflexible resource model?

"*Command & Conquer 4* is deploying an entirely new resource model, derived from a desire to better balance our gameplay, and integrate our narrative better into the gameplay. While we're still in the process of iterating on this new economy, we can safely say that it will not involve the traditional Tiberium Fields or Harvesters, but will still allow players to harass, sabotage, and otherwise interfere with the economies of their opponents. More details soon, we promise!"

Again drawing from *Red Alert 3* observations, will units have the same level of special abilities as they did in *Red Alert 3*, requiring extensive micromanagement, or will they be more amenable to a micro/macro-managed play style, as was the case with all previous Tiberium games?

"While *Red Alert 3* was definitely a high-lethality, hard-counter, and micromanagement-orientated RTS, with *C&C4* we are aiming for a more even balance between micro and macro play, with an emphasis on softer counters and overall lower unit lethality. This not only brings us in line with previous Tiberium Universe titles, but also provides a smoother learning curve for those new to the genre."

"Online all the time." Does this mean that an Internet connection will always be required? How about LAN play?

"Given that our persistent Player Progression system allows players to earn experience points in all game modes – skirmish, single player, co-op and multiplayer – and then carry any upgrades or new units earned over to any other game mode (or location, since they can move their profile from machine to machine), we need to ensure that the stats are always accurate and prevent cheating. Consequently, we need the player to be online all the time, much like in an MMO, allowing us to monitor their progress.

Online all the time felt like a natural step for our game. It also allowed us to get rid of the copy-protection system (DRM) used in *Red Alert 3*, which caused quite a commotion in the gaming community last year. Being online all the time will also enable players to be mobile, take their account with them, and log in on different PCs with the game installed. To play the game in multiplayer mode in a group setting, every PC needs to have an online connection so that players can access their accounts."

Will there be a cooperative campaign mode akin to the one in *Red Alert 3*, and will it be possible to play it over LAN this time around?

"We are definitely offering a compelling co-op mode for *C&C 4*. Our research from *Red Alert 3* showed that co-op was one of the most popular features, so we wanted to make sure to not only include the feature, but build on it. Co-op gives players the opportunity to engage in a more social gaming experience, one that promotes teamwork, a play style we are also encouraging with our 5v5 multiplayer mode. So, yes, you will be able to play the campaigns either alone or in co-op mode while online with a friend. Since *C&C 4* features persistent player progression that allows you to log into your account from other PCs, this also counts for the co-op mode."



**"GDI AND NOD ALLY TO
CONSTRUCT THE TIBERIUM
CONTROL NETWORK, IN
ORDER TO SAVE HUMANITY
FROM EXTINCTION. "**

Persistent upgrades that are shared across all play modes are certainly intriguing. However, how do you plan to balance this? Also, is it a goal to make this game competitive in the sense that the *Command & Conquer 3* titles have been? If so, will there be a 'mode' that offers a level playing field?

"One of the things we have noticed over the years of watching our *C&C* community play is that most people are intimidated by the online experience, and that the majority of our players actually stay offline. We wanted to create a model that allowed even newcomers

to our *C&C* universe to be able to play online and have a great time without 'dumbing down' the game and driving away our core online community. By introducing a persistent player progression, where every unit you kill gives you experience points and helps you level up and that lets you gain these points in campaign, skirmish or multiplayer, we can ensure that even if you lose a battle, you still have something to show for it. The levelling system also allows us to auto-match players of similar skill levels. You can, of course, still use our invite system to play with the friends you want to play with even if they are of a higher level.

As for balance, our goal is for higher-level players to have more options, not simply be more powerful. We're already deep in the balance process, and will have an extensive Beta programme to ensure the balancing is good.

Overall, our new class-based system, the crawler, and our player progression will add a whole new layer of strategic depth for our competitive players, with which they can then battle it out in 5v5 multiplayer matches, which we are doing for the first time in a *C&C* game."

Role-based classes – nice! While it is evident that team-based play is a priority, will one-versus-one play still be rewarding?

If you've played *[i]Tiberian Sun [i]* you may remember the Mammoth Tank MkII - now behold its descendant, the Mastodon, escorted by railgun-equipped Titans, as it bears down on a Nod base.



"Definitely! All the classes are designed to balance against one another, ensuring that a Support vs. Defence match is as interesting and engaging as Offense vs. Offense. It is more about choosing the class that best matches your playing style than picking the one that is 'better'."

Respawning is potentially dangerous territory. What exactly will be respawning? Will the player be represented as an on-field entity?

"Because our core multiplayer is no longer based around simply 'killing the other guy', but rather achieving specific battlefield objectives, dying no longer means the end of your game. While your death and need to respawn will be a disadvantage to your team in the short term, you are quickly back on the battlefield - potentially as a different class - and helping your team achieve their goals."

Think of death in *C&C4* as being the RTS analogue to death in the *Battlefield* series - not a desired state, and not beneficial to your team, but also not a long-term condition. We want you back on the battlefield, kicking ass!"

Mobile bases. Given that the story's timeline has progressed, and therefore technologies have evolved, it makes sense that such advancement has made possible greater battlefield flexibility. What can you tell us about this new strategic mobility?

"For *C&C4*, we wanted to take a more flexible, streamlined approach to base building. Rather than building a series of structures to improve your army, your units, structures, powers and upgrades all live within your mobile base, the Crawler. For maximum flexibility, these can even be built while your Crawler is on the move; just load up the hull with units - up to a set maximum - and then next time you deploy, out they come."

This new system may appear simplified from our previous base-building systems, but while we do lose some base-building micromanagement, our internal play sessions have shown



that the flexibility of the Crawler system actually introduces a variety of new tactical approaches – especially since each class gets their own unique Crawler, with unique weapons, abilities, attributes and build choices. For instance, an Offense player can bring their Crawler, a heavily armoured walker, right up to the frontlines and use it both as a combatant and as a source of buffs, upgrades and new units. On the other hand, a support Crawler's ability to fly allows it to move quickly through multiple battlefronts, focusing on wherever it is needed most.

Of course, your Crawler is also your most valuable unit, so each time you bring it into battle, the reward is balanced out by significant risk."

Will *Command & Conquer 4* be using a new version of the venerable and very capable SAGE Engine, or is a new engine being developed? If SAGE is the option, then what modifications have been made to it?

"Yes, we continue to use SAGE - albeit in heavily modified form - for the underlying tech in our game. However, continuing from the massive overhaul enacted during *Red Alert 3*'s development, SAGE has been significantly upgraded, resulting in a ton of new features and technological improvements.

Notably, we have rebuilt our networking and matchmaking systems from the ground up, something our fans have been asking us to do for quite some time. Our new systems allow, amongst other things, full clan and party support, meaning you can move from game to game without abandoning your friends or clanmates, ranked matchmaking, fully integrated chat in every screen of the UI, and numerous other features to improve the online experience.

On the less subtle front, we have implemented a deferred lighting system, building on the HDR lighting engine from *RA3*. This allows every element on the game screen to function as a light source, which really brings the battlefield to life. We've also added a significantly improved particle system, allowing denser, more believable explosions, effects and debris, all without sacrificing performance."

What steps are being taken - design choices, etc. - to make the game more appealing to newcomers?

"The goal of making *C&C4* more appealing to newcomers without alienating our core fans is at the very heart of our development process. While we have made several subtle changes to ensure a more welcoming experience - notably going for a lower lethality, soft counter-orientated balance, and ensuring that our auto-matching system provides fair fights every time - the big elements here are the Crawler, the persistent player progression, and our respawn system; which balance the needs of new players with the desires of the hardcore.

The Crawler simplifies base building by concentrating all the 'base' elements in a single, mobile structure, allowing us to add the strategic options of a mobile base. Additionally, with the Crawler, players don't have to focus on two different settings at the same time anymore - the base and the battlefield - allowing them to better focus on achieving their goals.

With our player-progression system, we have eliminated another one of the core issues for entry-level players. By allowing the player to start with a more limited selection of units, we reduce the verticality of our learning curve, allowing you to get the hang of the game; but as you level up and increase in skill, we can award you with units of increasing complexity and power without overwhelming the player. At the same time, we want to ensure that you're rewarded every time you play, so the more hardcore players will rapidly find themselves with more than enough options (we have more units in *C&C4* than any of our previous RTS games) to satisfy them. Furthermore, the player-progression system helps keep the player engaged in the game - if you are stuck in the campaign, you can go try some skirmish, level up, and then come back with your expanded forces to try again.

Finally, with the respawn system, losing your Crawler doesn't mean losing the game - after a few seconds, you're right back on the battlefield. This helps to eliminate the dispiriting nature of losing, since you're not out for long, and the 'I'm dead, but my friends are still in the game, what do I do for 20 minutes'



Here you see GDI's Offense Crawler in its deployed (left) and mobile (right) modes. In deployed mode, Crawlers trade off mobility for various other advantages.



scenario that has marred our previous multiplayer experiences."

With the NOD and GDI alliance, can we expect any hybrid units, and do you have any examples?

"The alliance between GDI and NOD is part of the back-story for *C&C4*. We start out the game when that alliance is starting to become weakened, and people are sensing that something is about to happen.

We are not planning on hybrid units - the underlying concept is that the alliance has been marred by conflict from extremists, resulting in a cold war-style military escalation from both camps."

Will there still be pure NOD/GDI factions?

"*Command & Conquer 4* will feature two factions, GDI and NOD. Both of our factions are divided into three classes - Offense, Defense, and Support. There is no 'all-rounder' class."

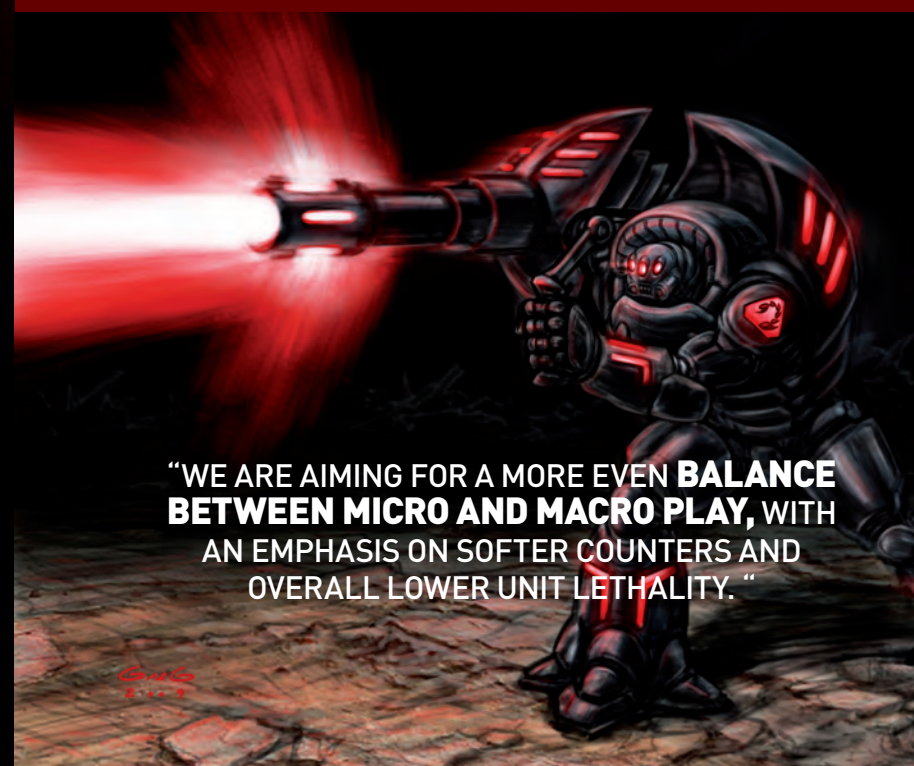
**"WE WANTED A
STREAMLINED APPROACH
TO BASE BUILDING.
RATHER THAN BUILDING A
SERIES OF STRUCTURES TO
IMPROVE YOUR ARMY."**

Objective-based multiplayer: will these be secondary objectives during a regular game or a dedicated game mode? Will we still have a regular 'annihilation' option?

"Our core multiplayer gameplay is objective based - we're currently in the middle of iterating on the design, but I'm sure we'll have more to say about this in the near future."

Will the three different classes have unique units and support powers as in *Kane's Wrath/Zero Hour*?

"Outside a few shared essential units (Engineers etc.) each class consists entirely of unique units, structures, and powers,



"WE ARE AIMING FOR A MORE EVEN BALANCE BETWEEN MICRO AND MACRO PLAY, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON SOFTER COUNTERS AND OVERALL LOWER UNIT LETHALITY."

including the Crawler. Offense is your classic, Tank-orientated frontline-combat class, using a variety of vehicles and upgrades to punch deep into enemy territory. Defense, however, are all about locking down sections of the map, emphasizing infantry, bunkers and turrets, although they too have vehicles. Finally, as Support, the emphasis is on mobility and powers, using a variety of aircraft and specialised ground vehicles to quickly navigate the environment, scout the enemy, then support your fellow players with direct damage powers, heals, buffs, and hit-and-run attacks.

These specialisations are supported by the class-specific Crawler designs, each with unique abilities and weapons; as an example, the Support Crawler's vehicle mode can take to the air, allowing it to quickly navigate to the latest battlefield hotspots.

As you might imagine, there are more units in *C&C4* than any of our previous RTS titles. It should also be emphasized that all classes are capable of defeating enemy players – even when playing Support, your class will have more than enough flexibility to mix things up on the battlefield."

Persistent upgrades. Does this mean we can expect some form of a persistent online war or online global conquest mode?

"By persistent we mean that your upgrades and experience points stay with you. They are tied to your account in a similar manner to MMOs. Every unit you kill (in single player, co-op, multiplayer, or skirmish) will give you experience, allowing you to level up, upgrade your army, and use different strategies."

Will Joe Kucan or any other familiar actors be returning?

"*C&C 4* will definitely see the return of Joe Kucan as Kane. Joe is Kane, and it wouldn't be the same without him."

Who or what are the GDI and NOD allying against?

"GDI and NOD ally to construct the Tiberium Control Network, in order to save humanity from extinction. As our story begins, that alliance is beginning to unravel..."

Can you describe the design team? What makes them the best possible people to put this game together and what makes them tick?

"The *C&C4* team is a balanced mix of veteran RTS developers, from EALA and elsewhere, and the best and brightest young minds. Our desire, obviously, is to make the best game possible, but on a deeper level, we really want to dig into the core RTS play, to examine the assumptions and compulsions that drive the genre we love so much."

Where does the development team draw inspiration from?

"We draw our inspiration from everywhere – from the classic RTS games we love so much, from the latest innovations in game technology and design, from films, books, music. We envision a more inclusive world of RTS play, and *C&C4* is our first attempt at realising that vision."

What were/are the biggest challenges in producing/developing *Command & Conquer 4*?

"It's a massive, hugely ambitious game with a lot of new ideas... everything is challenging! ;)

On a more serious note, the hardest part has been (as veteran RTS developers) to get past our basic assumptions of RTS and really dig deep into the genre, while remaining true to our *C&C* fan base and the game's roots."

Is there anything else you'd like to add or highlight that we've neglected to ask about?

"It's worth mentioning that we're designing our campaigns with a new, AI-driven 'possibility space' methodology, something we've been prototyping for a long time. Essentially, rather than rigidly scripting the player experience, we are creating interesting tactical situations and then putting the reins in the hands of the player; they can approach a mission exactly how they see fit, use any class, play with whatever they've unlocked via our player progression system.

Rather than us dictating how the mission will play out, we allow the player to drive the experience."

Lastly, of course, can you give us an idea of when we can expect this title and across which formats?

"*Command & Conquer 4* will be out for the PC in 2010." **NAG**



Battlefield: Bad Company 2

It was such good company. The series makes a return for more, with much more.

Genre → First-Person Shooter

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

A SA MOISTENING LOTION for the soul, Educated gamers agree that little compares to the soothing power of blowing stuff up. The more articulate one can be in such destruction, the better its remedial properties. Science has proven it. The only thing known to enhance the already-potent panacea of physics-based pandemonium is when you can do it with friends. Or, in our case, when treated to a private play session with an early Alpha of *Battlefield: Bad Company 2*'s multiplayer, with complete strangers.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Last year, the series-divergent *Battlefield: Bad Company* provided a very opulent avenue for the removal of integrity, implicit in architectural structures through the application of medium-yield explosives, and the acquisition of gold from within such structures. While the single-player campaign of *Bad Company* was an enjoyable experience, its multiplayer component failed to really ignite the interest of the online gaming community. It was (and is for some, still) popular, but plays second fiddle to coeval titles such as *Modern Warfare*.

Standing outside the *Bad Company* 2 showroom at the EA booth, our group consisted primarily of older gentlemen in suits, who look like the type who invest, and us. Suffice it to say, we don't wear suits unless it suits us, and we are not gentlemen. When the door opened, we were ushered into a small room with eight Xbox 360s. The din and clamour of the E3 show floor outside



became mercifully muffled.

Senior Producer on the game, Patrick Bach, cut straight to the chase. We're going to play a multiplayer round in the Rush game type (which was in *Bad Company*). It's an objective-based game type: one team has to plant demo charges on specific crates, while the other team attempts to stop them. We were on the assaulting team. Bach had specific instructions for all of us. "I want you to try to destroy the game - take down buildings, take down walls, break things, do whatever you can to break the game." No problem, we're trained for such things.

DESTROY ALL HIGH-MOBILITY MULTIPURPOSE WHEELED VEHICLES

Even though it's still very early in development, the multiplayer Alpha



You can expect all the same humour, guns and rock and roll action from the first game



“Walls crumble, floors collapse, and **bricks pockmark the landscape, when a building decides to expand** its horizons because we shot it with a tank.”



of *Bad Company 2* contained all the trimmings we’ve come to expect from team-based multiplayer games. The various selectable classes, along the lines of Assault, Engineer, Scout and such, each contained their own specific kit, tailored to the tasks inherent to the class, though we mostly focused on ones that offered plenty of grenades. An interesting touch upon selecting a class is that you can choose to spawn at either the main base, an acquired forward base, or right on top of any teammate.

From there, the four-on-four multiplayer match played out as these things tend to do: plenty of explosions, prolific use of vehicles, such as assault helicopters and tanks, and a healthy obsession with shooting the other guy before he notices and shoots you. Admittedly, what made the experience even more enjoyable than usual was that, as mentioned before, we were in a room full of suits. While the helpful PR staff made sure the suits understood where they were going and what to do once there, we made use of the time to shoot them all in the head and, where possible, drive over them with tanks.

Since Mr Bach asked so nicely that we destroy the environment, we applied tank shells liberally to the various buildings dotted across the huge battlefield-sized landscape, and found that they responded satisfactorily. Walls crumble, floors collapse, and bricks pockmark the landscape, when a building decides to expand its horizons because we shot

it with a tank. While such articulate destruction is what *Bad Company* is known for, the fidelity with which it has been translated into the multiplayer is a serious cut above the usual ‘destructible environments’ developers promise us. Incidentally, this will also be the first *Battlefield* game to have blood in it.

BETTER AND BIGGER

With a year or so of development still ahead of the team, it remains to be seen where *Bad Company 2* is going to take itself from here. What we saw of the multiplayer side looked every bit the promise of a quality product once completed. Since the team obviously built upon what they had with the first game, even though it was an Alpha, there wasn’t a single bug in sight. The real question remains: what of the single player? The team wasn’t ready to talk about that yet, so we can expect a few surprises (one would hope), as they reveal details over the coming months. It’s safe to say that the team knows they’ve got something with *Bad Company* – the sequel is proof enough of that. Just in case anyone was curious, our assault team stormed the enemy lines, detonated all the objectives, and went on to win the match by a large margin. The suits may earn more money every month than we can dream of earning in our lifetimes, but we still ‘school’ them at headshots. And that’s where it counts, right?

NAG

Miktar Dracon



Rogue Warrior

Snapping a man's neck in the dark never gets old.

Grade-A military badass, or James Bond with a Beard?

Genre → First-Person Shooter
PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

"WE REALLY WANT TO make a kind of 80s action-movie game, so we're really focusing on getting big explosions, getting the soundtrack in... And, of course, Mickey Rourke will be the voice of the lead character," said Aaron Guy, Project Lead on *Rogue Warrior* (in development at Rebellion).

You may remember Rebellion's often-overlooked work on games such as *Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death*, *Rogue Trooper* and the much older PC and Atari Jaguar iterations of *Aliens vs. Predator*. Rebellion may not have the super-studio, rock-star allure of say, Epic or Rockstar; yet, each of their games has done well - both financially and with the fans. Each is also a good example of Rebellion's ability to carve quality titles out of the rich properties they licence, and from the looks of it, *Rogue Warrior* is no exception.

Loosely based on the style of adventure portrayed in the series of fiction novels by Richard Marcinko, *Rogue Warrior* is, on the surface, a first-person action shooter with stealth elements, cover-to-cover gunplay and a healthy obsession with gruesome kill-moves. What makes *Rogue Warrior* such an interesting property is the history of the author. Just as Ian Fleming's real-life experiences as a spy for British Intelligence brought a level of authenticity to his fantastically lucid James Bond novels, Richard Marcinko brings his experience as a Grade-A military badass to his fiction novels. While Tom Clancy writes eloquent, speculative fan fiction, Marcinko writes



gritty, unglamorous accounts of what it means "to kill or be killed."

DEMO DICK

The real Richard Marcinko was born in 1940, later becoming a Navy SEAL operative. His Navy career began with his enlistment in 1958 at 18 years of age, starting as a Teletype operator. Marcinko beat the crap out of a sailor after an argument, and was sent for rigorous UDT (Underwater Demolitions Team) training as punishment. Marcinko found the brutal training "perversely enjoyable." From there, his tour of duty included Vietnam, Cambodia, becoming part of the elite SEAL Team Two, and generally killing people quickly and efficiently. As detailed in his non-fiction book titled *Rogue Warrior*, Marcinko was later

Where's "Black Razor"?

In case you've been following this game since it was announced in 2006, you may be wondering what happened to its full name, original genre, developer and setting. For those who missed it, when Bethesda and Zombie Studios originally revealed the game, it was titled *Rogue Warrior: Black Razor*.

It was to be a tactical first-person shooter focusing on Marcinko and his team's campaign in North Korea, tasked with neutralising its nuclear-launch capability. The game was going to be developed for the Unreal Engine 3, support drop-in four-player cooperative, and an interesting multiplayer mode for up to 24 players; and would employ a random-tiling system for creating unpredictable maps for each play session.

Since then, the game has 'changed hands' to Rebellion Development, who has taken over production. The setting changed to 1986 USSR and North Korea. It no longer uses the Unreal Engine 3. Instead, it will use an in-house-developed proprietary engine. The cooperative play was removed, as well as the random-tiling system for multiplayer. The focus has been shifted to highlight Marcinko's personality and his various kill moves more. Lastly, the name was snipped to just *Rogue Warrior*.

Can we please keep the crotch grabbing to a minimum



“The bottom line: there isn’t a better guy to make a highly over-dramatised action game about, because **the dude is already pure uncut action in liquid form to begin with.**”



tasked with founding two United States Navy counter-terrorist units: SEAL Team Six and Red Cell.

Red Cell’s function was to test the Navy’s anti-terrorist capabilities. The extremely specialised team was able to infiltrate supposedly “impenetrable,” highly secure bases, nuclear submarines, and other military establishments you really don’t want to be ‘accessible’. Red Cell even managed to get aboard the Presidential plane, Air Force One; and in another incident, actually acquired nuclear launch codes by mildly torturing someone. These actions, even though they were part of his job, got Marcinko into a lot of hot water with several superior officers. The bottom line: there isn’t a better guy to make a highly over-dramatised action game about, because the dude is already pure uncut action in liquid form to begin with.

DICK KILLS AND MOVES

Our hands-on time with the game left several impressions on us, the most poignant of which is the carnally satisfying kill-moves you can enact on unsuspecting enemies. At its core, *Rogue Warrior* is a first-person shooter with all the usual trimmings. It’s possible to, from the onset, run and gun, although Dick’s movement speed is a touch slower than your usual first-person protagonist. This puts a bit more emphasis on playing it smart, rather than brave: you can shoot out lights to throw enemies into confusion, fire off a few shots in their direction, which put their focus squarely on where the shots were fired from, then sneak up behind them and enact a signature

kill-move when in close enough proximity.

As enemies make a point of trying to avoid being shot, using tactical kill-moves saves on bullets. As games like *Gears of War* have highlighted, doing a close-quarter kill with flourish is fun (for the person doing the killing, that is). *Rogue Warrior* takes that concept and expands on it. The type of kill-move is chosen from a huge range of animations, based on the situation. One kill move involves Dick grabbing the enemy’s gun and forcing him to shoot himself with it. Another involves stabbing a guy from behind in the crotch with a knife, then applying rapid stabs to the collapsing man’s kidneys. The aforementioned move is lovingly titled “Reassignment.” One of our favourites is the “Field Dress,” where you run up to a downed soldier, press a button, and Dick stabs the guy in the chest and saws his knife down to the crotch. It may be an understatement to call it gruesome.

THERE CAN ONLY BE ONE DICK

Of course, managing to catch a real person with one of these emasculating kill-moves is way better than killing hapless AI NPCs. In multiplayer, the highest-ranked player in a match gets to be Demo Dick and all that it brings, such as kill-moves and other benefits the team isn’t ready to talk about yet. In truth, aside from a short single-player level sporting some gritty environments, there is a lot to *Rogue Warrior* that remains to be seen. Rebellion has a lot to work with, so we’re curious to see how it turns out. **NAG**

Miktar Dragon



Jackson lights a fart after a big chilli dinner



SEEN AT E3

Alpha Protocol

Do you prefer to have your conversations shaken or stirred?

Genre→ Third-Person Action RPG

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

MORALITY: CONCERN OVER THE distinction between Right and Wrong, Good and Evil. In our lives, morality is a complex issue. What constitutes right and wrong, good and evil are just abstract ideas. Notions of morality are tied to the people, law, traditions, or nature of the system from within which the morality framework grows. In English: what we consider good is only good because we say it is, and vice versa. It's a consensus, highly dependent on the people being polled.

So far, videogames have represented morality as a much-polarised issue: two forces diametrically opposed to each other in a constant tug-of-war. The reasons why games offer up such simplified conflicts are many-fold. The simpler systems tap into the more basic foundations of the principles: Good vs. Evil is a classic tale, eternally retold. The Hero's Journey is a root mythology, which most gamers' foibles are told with. Everyone is, after all, the hero of his or her own story. Because a game is interactive, you invest yourself in it more. As a result, more of your brain wants something from it.

BLACK OR WHITE

The classic black or white, good or evil, kick the puppy or don't kick the puppy, is a morality system that is also very easy to program – the simpler the system, the fewer avenues for all your choices to be funnelled into. Games such as *inFAMOUS*, *Mass Effect*, *Fable II* and so forth all use the same sliding scale of morality: doing Good Things makes you more Good, while doing Bad Things makes you more Bad.



They all rely on the 'meta-game' of such systems to give the illusion of the player's morality having real impact on the faux universe inside the game. However, such systems are rather gimmicky - flavour without meat.

What is the alternative, then? Having a rainbow of choices in turn requires that all of them have relevant content, so the choices can play out to show the outcome. It's pretty clear that such a system is very uneconomical when you're on a tight budget and schedule, but your publisher requires the 'Morality' checkbox to be ticked in your Hot New Game. So, most developers opt for the simpler illusion of Good vs. Evil, where Good is usually the result of altruistic choices and Evil that of self-serving choices, all taking place in a large multiple-choice quiz answered using guns.



Upcoming super-spy adventure game, *Alpha Protocol*, has opted to dispense with such Fisher-Price-morality entirely: it's all about how you treat people vs. how they like to be treated. If someone likes to be treated badly, are you good for doing so? The black-and-white concepts of morality blur to a more realistic grey in *Alpha Protocol*, which is something the developers are specifically aiming for.

SMOOTH CRIMINAL

To sum up *Alpha Protocol*, think *Mass Effect*, but instead of science fiction, it's super spy. If you've never played *Mass Effect*, then *Alpha Protocol* is an action role-playing game. Killing bad guys gets you Experience Points with which to upgrade your skills, which all centre on weapon use or spy skills, such as Stealth and Hacking. Upgrade a skill high enough,



and you unlock Perks, such as faster reloading of shotguns or bullet-time Kung Fu, if you pump up your Close Quarter Combat Skill high enough. There is plenty of diversity in the skill choices, so you can craft almost any kind of super spy you may have come to know from pop culture, be it Jason Bourne, James Bond or Jack Bauer.

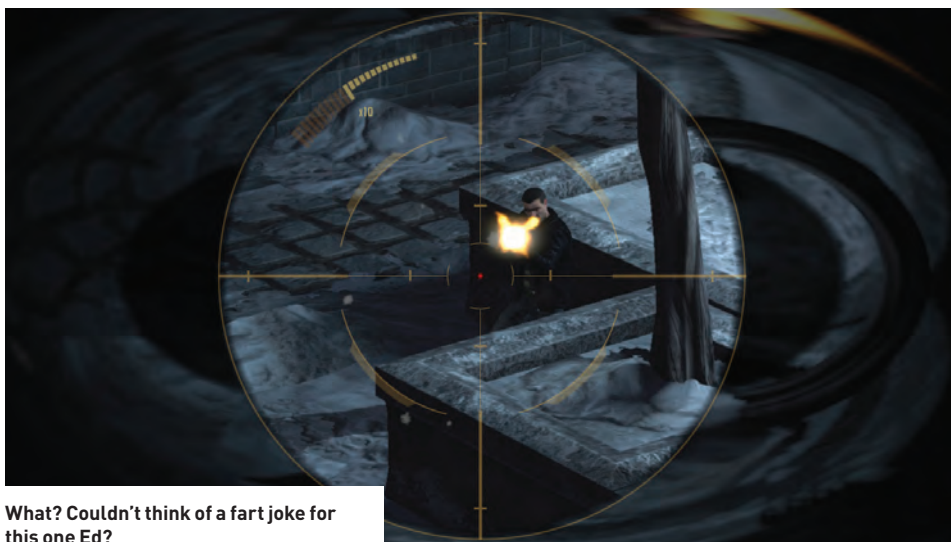
Alpha Protocol splits itself up into missions and side-missions, chosen from your super-spy lair. There is no wandering about, exploring areas outside of missions, as the premise enforces 'keeping a low profile'. In keeping the game so 'mission-centric', the developers may be missing out on the opportunity to really push the envelope of the genre. But understandably, most of their resources are going towards the intricate network of dynamics behind all the people you meet on your super-sleuth spree. As we were shown during a demonstration of the game at E3, there are many people you'll be interacting with; each one 'filled out' with exquisite personality and detail. In our case, one of them got shot, another had his head slammed into a door, but the crusty, old Russian was so interesting, we sat down and shared a drink with him, talking about his health.

HUMAN NATURE

Every time you interact with a character in the world of *Alpha Protocol*, your Research Dossier on them fills up with details about them and anyone they may mention in conversation. Slowly, you build up a wealth of information on people, a cache of exploitable personality traits and quirks. By playing off your knowledge of the people you know and might meet in the future, you can influence a great variety of factors. There are multiple points during missions where you can help or hinder an ally or foe: a character you agree to cooperate with at the beginning of the mission, you can backstab at the end, usually resulting in a face-off confrontation. Between missions, you can mine for information by meeting informants, and how you treat them not only changes how they act around you, but may also change how people that know them treat you.

An example shown, was meeting

"... you can craft **almost any kind of super spy you may have come to know from pop culture**, be it Jason Bourne, James Bond or Jack Bauer."



What? Couldn't think of a fart joke for this one Ed?

a contact at a bar before going on a mission that involved destroying illegal ammunition shipments. Talking to the contact without reading his dossier and making the choice to be brash, cocky and arrogant in conversation, leads to the contact's face smashed into the bar table (something that another character further down the story is actually glad you did, thus aiding you in an unexpected way). Conversations happen in real time, so you have a limited window in which to decide what you're going to say. Taking the time to know that the contact is having health issues (discovered during conversation with someone else), replaying the conversation - something done only for demonstration (in the proper game, you'd have to reload your save game) - led to a heartfelt talk about the contact's troubles, the sharing of some vodka and the ability to instead of destroying the ammunition shipment, re-route it to your headquarters via the contact for cheap guns.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

The complexity of the character interactions outside the dialogue tree choices you make is further influenced by the order in which you do things. Had you not talked to the contact before taking on the ammunition mission, you'd not have the option to re-route the shipment. Something the developers stressed is that your choices don't lock anything out: it changes things around, shifts things for or against you in the present, but with untold effects down the line.

There is an unprecedented amount of design and writing going into the web of interconnections between the hundreds of characters in *Alpha Protocol*, though the end result of this ambitious idea of removing morality in favour of a system in which how you treat people will define how they treat you, remains to be seen. Even if the 'morally-grey' idea fails, *Alpha Protocol* is still shaping up to be a stellar, third-person action RPG with slick super-spy moves. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon



R.U.S.E.

Truth is the first casualty of war

Genre→ Real-Time Strategy

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

WE THINK R.U.S.E. STANDS for 'Ratified Usage of Strategic Espionage', but Eugen is being oddly coy about the acronym for their newest real-time strategy game. For all we know, it could stand for 'Really Understated Spectacular Explosions'. From our vantage point, viewing the demonstration of the game at the massive Ubisoft booth at E3, it may as well be both. The person giving the demonstration effortlessly slides his fingers across a giant table that is also a screen, giving his units movement commands; like a General sliding plastic unit markers across a small-scale model of the battlefield. He zooms in to look at the action in more detail, and the plastic unit markers cross-fade into realistic tanks and infantry. He zooms in a bit more, and admires the fruit on a market stall in the middle of the two clashing forces.

Incidentally, it's amusing what you overhear at giant expos like E3. Behind us, a rotund 'swag-harvester' remarks derisively and without a trace of irony, "Does Ubisoft really expect us to buy a twenty thousand-dollar table just to play this game?" Our corpulent friend misunderstood the thematic appeal of demonstrating a game that makes you feel like a war-room general, by using a table that matches the spirit of the game's visuals and control scheme. If he had turned around, he would have noticed the game being played on Xbox 360s without the fancy Microsoft Surface table. Developer Eugen knows its home genre quite well, as is evident in their previous game, *Act of War: Direct Action*, and its expansion, *High Treason*. With *R.U.S.E.*,



however, the team is taking the genre into an interesting, new, unexplored avenue.

Producer Mathieu Girard remarks that the three main ideas behind the game are dimension, deception and depth. The first is visualised by the game's shiny new proprietary engine, IRISZOOM, which allows an unprecedented view of the battlefield on three levels. The high-level view shows the field as if it's on a tabletop, complete with the blurred backdrop of a room beyond the edges, and unit groups displayed as little plastic army markers. Zoom in a bit more, and you get the full, 3D strategic world, with the final zoom being a 'close-up' of the action. Each zoom level has its own contextual commands and battle considerations, and zooming between them is seamless.

The deception in *R.U.S.E.* is achieved by activating special ability cards on specific sectors of the battlefield at the most zoomed-out level. Fake tanks and soldiers, 'deceiving' intelligence to your enemy about your unit strengths, and even trucks that go build fake wooden bases, are all part of trying to psyche your enemy into making costly mistakes. Cards can be reused and redeployed, but you're limited to which cards you bring



into the game before the match starts. Finally, depth is about strategic decisions instead of what Girard calls, "click-fest micromanagement." Six factions duke it out in *R.U.S.E.*, and each can erect structures while harvesting resources. Resources are limited, so players who like to 'turtle' will have to change their tactics a little.

The factions – USA, UK, Italy, France, Germany and USSR – each have their own advantages. Russia is all about cheap conscripts and potent artillery; the US has bombers; France can set up defensive lines; and Germany has über-tanks. The campaign takes place across Europe and North Africa, including Italy, Tunisia and Normandy. Multiplayer will support four-on-four competitive play, but no cooperative play. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

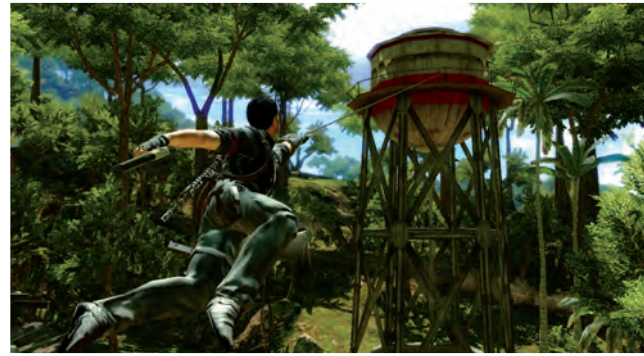
The logo features the word "BATMAN" in a stylized, jagged font with a metallic, rusted texture. The letters are primarily orange and yellow, with dark, charred edges. The text is set within the silhouette of a bat, which is rendered in a dark, metallic grey. The background is a dark, textured blue-grey, with several black bat silhouettes in flight, creating a sense of movement and menace.

BATMAN

ARKHAM

ASYLUM

TM



Just Cause 2

Blow up some beaches, then hijack a plane

Genre → Action

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

PLAYING 'WHACK-A-MOLE' WITH EVIL banana republic dictators never gets old. It's like a tropical-island-paradise-vacation getaway from playing 'whack-a-mole' with evil space aliens. Spicy lead protagonist Rico Rodriguez returns with his own brand of salsa justice; and this time, he has a grappling hook. Taking place on an entirely new island - the fictional tropical island of Panau in Southeast Asia - Rodriguez is tasked with overthrowing the evil dictator, Baby Panay. He also has to take down his former boss, Tom Sheldon.

Thanks to the upgraded Avalanche Engine from the first game, *Just Cause 2* is bigger, more detailed, and this time, features more than two types of tree. The gameplay remains similar to its predecessor: you roam free around the island, taking on missions at leisure, and generally being a royal pain the arse for the local militia. During a demonstration of the game at E3, we saw the new grappling hook in action, the new improved AI, and the funky stunt parachute for any time, anywhere self-extractions from sticky situations. Enemies now use their surroundings to their advantage, taking cover behind crates, and dynamically assess the situation based on what's nearby. The aiming system has been 'reformatted' into a hybrid system that incorporates both auto-locking and manual precision aiming: you lock on to an enemy quickly and easily, and then adjust your shot manually to shoot them either in the

head or elsewhere.

The beautiful island of Panau - looking like a cross between Hawaii and New Zealand - is huge, very huge. Six hundred square kilometres huge, with over 200 settlements dotted across its varied landscape. The environments vary: snowy mountain ranges, deserts, jungles, and sunny beaches. All of this is subject to weather changes, as well as day/night cycles. To make traversing the island easier, you can at any time pop out your stunt parachute and use the grapple to attach to passing vehicles, or just reel yourself along the ground to get altitude. If you want to, you could attach yourself to a passing jumbo jet. Or, because the grappling gun lets you attach anything to anything, you could literally shoot one side into an enemy vehicle and the other end into a helicopter - the results of such emergent pairings are hilarious. During the demonstration, we saw enemies get bolted to cars, dragged behind vehicles, or just attached to each other and sent flying, thanks to a carefully placed heat-seeking rocket shot. The developers make no secret of the fact that, much like what made the first game so successful, *Just Cause 2* is all about having fun.

Vehicles have real-time deformations and parts can come off. Using the Black Market, you can buy new weapons and vehicles - all of it upgradeable. You find parts on the island, or through missions, with which to upgrade and improve guns and cars. More mission types, a great variety of situations and locations: everything *Just Cause* needed in the first place.

NAG
Miktar Dracon



This is why you should wear a seatbelt



BATMAN

ARKHAM ASYLUM





Split/Second

Why boost when you can blow s**t up?

Genre → Arcade Racing

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

LAST YEAR, BLACK ROCK Studio brought some much-needed 'aeration' to ATV racing with their vertically orientated, big-air racer, *Pure*. The studio has a diverse history with the racing genre, going back as far as the arcade-style *Hot Wheels: World Race* in 2003, then moving on to more simulation-based fair with *MotoGP '06* and '07. Building on the momentum of the exhilaration of *Pure*, the studio's next game is a literally explosive tour de force, set in a fictional, reality-TV programme, where racers duke it out for fame and fortune.

At first glance, *Split/Second* looks like a *Burnout* contender. Visually, the game shares much with the Criterion-developed 'domination' of the arcade-racing genre: both play with an enforced external view of the car and both have giant meters that fill up when you drift, or other risky stunts/manoeuvres such as precision driving close to objects. Both also glorify violent car crashes with stunning flair. Where *Burnout* uses the meter for boost, *Split/Second* takes a different approach. The "Powerplay" meter, as it's called, is used to trigger track-altering shortcuts (such as crashing a 747 into the runway the race runs through), or to drop explosives on your opponents.

We were treated to a private showing of an unfinished level of *Split/Second*, which really highlighted what makes the game such an interesting divergence. "This is as much an action game as a racing game," said *Split/Second*'s design director, Paul Glancey. The Harbor level races through dockyard containers, a half-built tanker, and tight turns around construction equipment. Each level contains over eighty trigger points



you can activate: the bigger the trigger, the more of your Powerplay bar it uses. Helicopters hovering over the track use up a single stock of the three-part Powerplay bar when you trigger them, causing them to drop an explosive on the track – this can either take out a racer, complete with Criterion-style crash camera, or the shockwave will send them careening into a spin. These types of Powerplays reset every lap, but the larger ones (like causing the unfinished tanker to slide off its construction struts and into the ocean, changing the course layout entirely) are one-shot activations. The AI racers can also trigger Powerplays, though the developers assured us that the larger, more spectacular Powerplays are generally reserved for the player to activate. Knowing where the Powerplays are and when to trigger them is part of the game's learning experience, though even a near miss in dropping explosives on opponents is a spectacular 'kaboom'.

To keep the player as engrossed in the action as possible, the HUD has been kept free of most unnecessary elements (speedometer, map, etc.). Only the lap count, race position and the Powerplay



meter are dynamically placed behind the car itself. The reality-TV theme of the game is also translated into its level structure: the game plays out over numerous seasons – each season comprises 24 episodes. An episode consists of three race events, with your standing after each season playing a part in whether you progress or not. Will *Split/Second* explode on to the track and become a lasting franchise, or will it end up being a curious distraction while *Burnout* remains the race leader? We can't wait to find out. **NAG**

Miktat Dracon

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PLAYSTATION 3



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Fairytale Fights

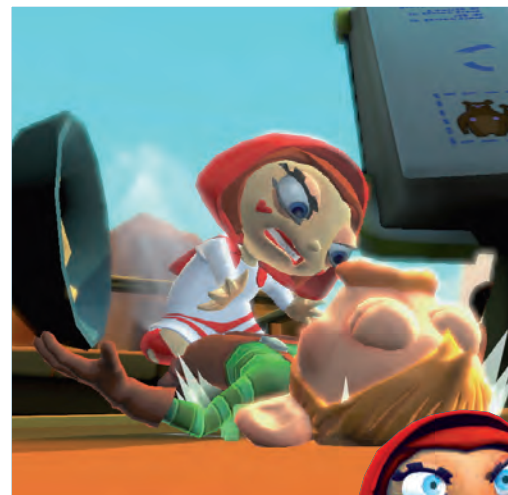
Blood, guts, and glory for forgotten fairytales. Fun!

Genre→ Action / Hack-and-Slash

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

ONCE UPON A TIME, Little Red Riding Hood sat depressed and angry that she was no longer the fairytale superstar she once had been. Lamenting her loss of fame and glory, she picked up an axe, started brutally murdering candy-bread ninjas, lumberjack gnomes, and stuffed teddy bears. She would carve out a new legacy for herself, in the chest of a giant. The blood pooled beneath her feet, as she hacked another gnome in half; the dismembered creature's skeleton showing as its bisected body pieces flopped to the side. It's "black-humour-slapstick-comedy-gore," we're told.

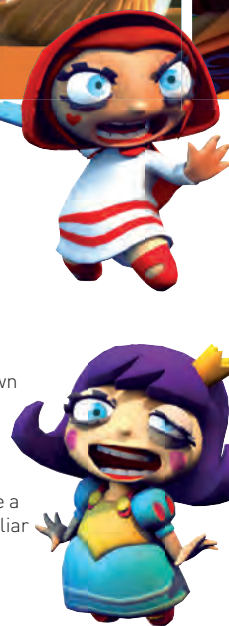
By this point, it was pretty clear to everyone in the room that *Fairytale Fights* is quite something. The developers grinned mischievously, admitting that their inspiration came from the child-like gore of *The Itchy & Scratchy Show*, as well as the sheer, awe-inspiring horror of *Happy Tree Friends*. The interesting theme and violent cartoon overtones aside, *Fairytale Fights* is an 'up-to-four-player, cooperative hack-and-slash brawler, in the same line as *Golden Axe*; or more recently, *Castle Crashers*. Players fight their way through levels, picking up weapons, and use the environment to their advantage. Weapons include axes, swords, and even 'candy canes'. Environmental hazards, like giant wood-cutting, buzz saw blades, need to be avoided, but can also be used to take out enemies, by throwing/hitting them into them. When the action gets frantic, so much blood pools on the floor that the characters, which include Sleeping



Beauty and Snow White, actually start slipping in on it, skidding along.

The levels shown to us at E3 were twisted, happy, and colourful. The hub level, from which players select missions or upgrade their characters' stats, looks as if Tim Burton decided to 'draw' a children's storybook while on acid. The buildings and backdrops are all constructed out of books: from the mountains in the far distance, right down to the stairs leading up to the houses. From there, the action takes place across a variety of locations: inside the gingerbread castle of a witch who eats children, across the bookshelves inside a giant's house, and other strangely familiar places.

An interesting twist to the combat system is that while the left analogue stick controls motion, the right one controls the exact direction the character



slashes in. Swiping the stick from side to side results in gnomes being cut in half; or, if you aim higher, ends in their decapitation. If you catch a character just right, you're treated to a pop-up window showing you a close-up of the real-time character dismemberment, complete with skeletons that stick out from the red innards of your victims. If you're quick, you can actually reduce an enemy to small meaty chunks that slap to the ground, oozing thick, red blood. Additionally, magic spells mix things up with elemental attacks, deathmatch lets you slice and dice your friends, and the entire game 'looks' to be a great showcase of what the Unreal Engine 3 can do when it's not being used to render bald space marines. *Fairytale Fights* looks like snarky, perverted fun - if you can handle the cartoon violence. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon



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Look & Listen
For the Fans



Oprah's new bodyguards quickly figured out why the danger pay triples during "car giveaway" episodes.



Left 4 Dead 2

More 'deader'

Genre → FPS

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

ZOMBIE GAMES ARE NOTHING new, but the first *Left 4 Dead* certainly went out of its way to prove that not everything had been done already. Using the unique and utterly sadistic AI Director, feisty characters and a no-nonsense approach to weaponry, *L4D* set out to make sure every play-through was exhilarating, violent and usually rather terrifying. That was then, and now *L4D2* is approaching. It's aiming to take every one of its predecessor's features and run wild, quite possibly screaming, into the night.

Simply titled *Left 4 Dead 2*, the game will follow the exploits of four new Survivors, as they fight and claw their way through five new campaigns, set across the southern states of the USA, beginning in Savannah, Georgia, and culminating in New Orleans, Louisiana. The developers are pushing to better integrate the story into the game, creating meaningful transitions between the chapters, instead of simply leaving it at "right, now you're in an airport." To aid in this, as the characters progress through the game, they'll reveal their back-stories, interact with each other (often at the most inopportune times), and develop deep personalities, unlike anything we've seen in the first *L4D*.

While that's all well and good, this is a zombie game, after all; one that would be a sad case indeed if it didn't pack a ton of enraged Infected and weaponry with which to defeat them. In terms of the actual gameplay, *L4D2* won't

undo anything *L4D* created – only add to it. There will be additional, special Infected, including the massive Charger and a roaming Witch, as well as a number of adjustments to the regular Infected – the more resilient of which will be flameproof. Thankfully, there will be a collection of new weaponry to help you deal with these problems. The list hasn't been finalised, but what we do know is that there will be a new submachine gun (with a silencer), combat shotgun and sniper rifle, as well as incendiary rounds that will ignite any Infected unlucky enough to get in their way. To top it off, there will be a new 'class' of collectable melee weapons. These new tools include a frying pan (complete with satisfying sound effects upon impact), a baseball bat, a fire axe, and the long-anticipated chainsaw. Infected can now be dismembered with accurate enough blows to their legs or arms, or even have their faces ripped off with sufficient finesse.

Also getting an overhaul is the much-hated AI Director – the programming behind all the Infected and the reason why every play-through is as unique as possible. Along with the regular and special hordes, the Director 2.0 will have access to new tools, including weather and lighting conditions. It will also have much greater control over the game world itself, shaping certain passages accordingly and turning a usually direct walk in the cemetery into an hour-long slog through an almost maze-like gauntlet. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

Cheese and whine

If you're a little surprised to discover that there's a *Left 4 Dead 2* on its way, you're not alone. Tens of thousands of gamers have lodged complaints and signed petitions over Valve's alleged broken promises to generate new [presumably free] content for the original *Left 4 Dead*, instead of this new paid-for game. Valve was quick to respond to the complaints, claiming that the type of content players can expect to see are far from what could be implemented with a few updates, and that there will still be considerable updates for the first game. But the critics don't seem to be sold just yet. According to Valve's Gabe Newell, "Some in the community are concerned that the announcement of *L4D2* implies a change in our plans for *L4D*. We aren't changing our plans for *L4D*. In addition to the recently released Survival Pack, we are releasing authoring tools for mod makers, community matchmaking, 4x4 matchmaking, and more new content during the coming months for *L4D*."



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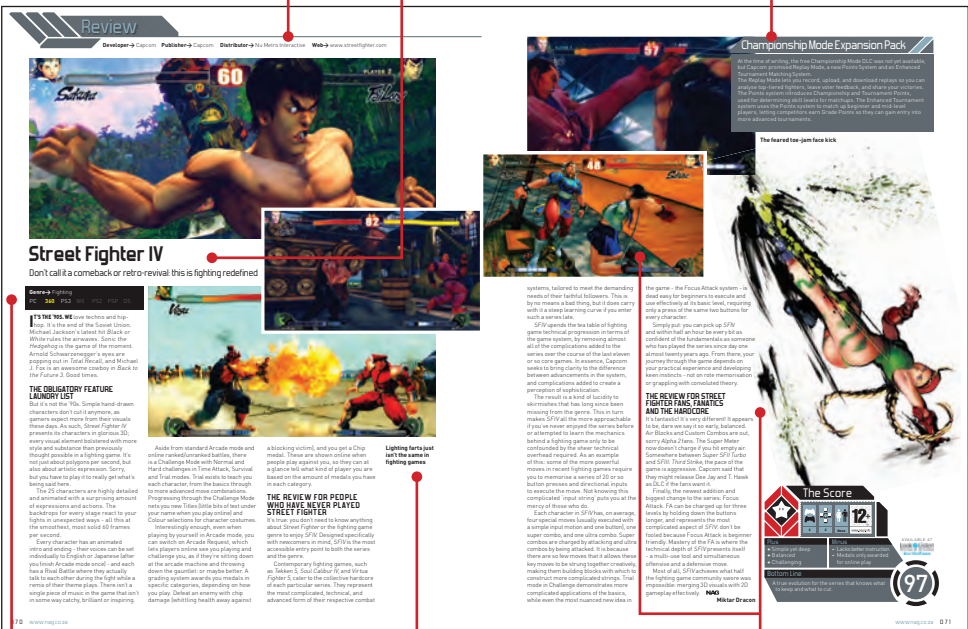


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A quick guide to the NAG Reviews section

BOX OUTS: More good stuff. Just in a box.



SCREENSHOTS AND ARTWORK: The game looks something like this, presumably

AWARD: Is this game worthy of our praise? If so, it gets an award. See details below.

PLUS/MINUS: What we liked, and what we didn't, in concise bullet-point format

THE BOTTOM LINE: Here's where we condense the entire review into 20 words or less. Because reading is hard...



What We're Playing

Unless you've been living under a rock, you probably heard about NAG's Call of Duty 4 match against ATF last month. Let's just say things didn't go so well for us. The trouble is, ever since our drubbing, whenever we load up CoD, we all begin to shake violently and uncontrollably... we've been in therapy ever since, and we've had to tone down our gaming a bit for the month. So, here's what we've been playing while we recover:

#	GAME NAME
1	Chess
2	Checkers
3	Coinage
4	Outside
5	Sudoku
6	Crossword puzzles
7	Solitaire
8	The entire PopCap games library
9	Hide and seek
10	With ourselves

Distributors

Apex Interactive	[011] 796-5040
Asbis	[011] 848-7000
ASUS SA	[011] 783-5450
Axiz	[011] 237-7000
Comstar	[011] 314-5812
Comstek	0860 600 557
Core Group	[087] 940-3000
Corex	[011] 655-8800
Cosmic Comics	[011] 476-9640
Drive Control Corporation	[011] 201-8927
EA South Africa	[011] 516-8300
Esquire	0861 700 000
Eurobyte	[011] 234-0142
Foxcomp	[011] 912-6300
Frontosa	[011] 466-0038
Incredible Connection	0860 011 700
Intel Corporation	[011] 806-4530
Legend Memory	[011] 314-0817
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Rectron	[011] 203-1000
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Samsung	0860 726 7864
Sapphire ATI	[044] 384-0225
Sonic Informed	[011] 314-5800
Ster-Kinekor Games	[011] 445-7700
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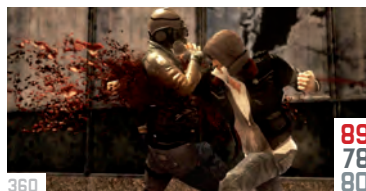
If your company isn't listed here, phone NAG on [011] 704-2679

Web Scores

How do our scores compare to everyone else's? We've provided scores from Metacritic and Game Rankings for reference.

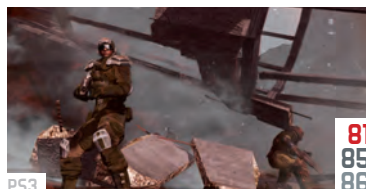
NAG // Metacritic // Game Rankings

PROTOTYPE



89
78
80

RED FACTION: GUERRILLA



81
85
86

GHOSTBUSTERS: THE VIDEO GAME



86
80
81

FUEL



68
66
63

BATTLESTATIONS: PACIFIC



80
76
75

TRANSFORMERS: REVENGE OF THE FALLEN



62
64
68

SBK 09: SUPERBIKE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP



78
70
65

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energy drink

Yeah, we're not sure what's happening here either. Don't question its purpose for too long though - Alex Mercer isn't best known for his patience...



PROTOTYPE

You can toss cars at helicopters. What more do you want?

Genre→ Sandbox Action Adventure

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

WE'VE ALL PLAYED SANDBOX-STYLE games before. More often than not, these games, regardless of all the freedom that they offer players, place limitations on what is possible in the game world. *PROTOTYPE* takes these limitations, wipes its butt with them, and tosses their tattered remains out the nearest window to engage the player in some crazy, chaotic action. Let me try to explain by painting some pretty, imaginary pictures of a typical situation that we've all experienced before in other sandbox titles. You're hauling ass down a crowded city street with all manner of law enforcement personnel chasing you down, because you couldn't pass up on the sheriff's daughter's oh-so-enticing offer. It's you against the world and you think you're winning. Suddenly, you reach a dead-end: a 50-story building blocks your path and the cops have you surrounded. In any other open-world game, this would probably be where you make your last desperate stand and try to fight off the fuzz. When that doesn't work, you respawn near a hospital minus some in-game currency and without all those fancy weapons you spent so much time collecting. Sound familiar? This sort of thing doesn't happen in *PROTOTYPE*. That 50-story building that I mentioned earlier. In *PROTOTYPE*, you simply hold down the right trigger and sprint up the side of the building. If you'd rather stand and fight, that's fine - just grab one of the civilian vehicles nearby and toss it at your pursuers. You might choose to shift your 'biomass' into the ground and cause a massive wave of spikes to erupt



Hang on... I feel a Hulk joke coming on... Just give me a second...

from beneath that crowded city street, and destroy anything and everything around you. If that sounds like fun, then you can have a cookie. That's exactly what *PROTOTYPE* is: simple, mindless, uninhibited fun that doesn't let up from start to finish. Quite simply, this game is so enjoyable that we're surprised it's even legal.

PROTOTYPE casts players as Alex Mercer (voiced by Barry Pepper), a guy who wakes up one day on a morgue slab without any memory of who, where or what he is. He discovers fairly quickly that, aside from the fact that he just came back from the dead, he's not an average citizen. He has abilities and powers that normal people can only dream of. His strength, agility, and endurance have increased to unreal levels and, naturally, he wants to know how this happened to him. Alex begins his journey





by trying to piece together his shattered memories, which he does by 'questioning' (I'll explain the pure awesome that is Alex Mercer's interrogation technique in a bit) key players in the conspiracy behind Alex's awe-inspiring powers and the strange virus that is spreading through New York City (the setting for the game). *PROTOTYPE*'s story isn't mind blowing, and it involves the usual 'evil-corporations-doing-bad-things-until-a-military-outfit-comes-in-to-clean-up-their-mess' type of stuff that we're all used to. The story may be unoriginal, but it's presented well and there's never a truly dull moment in Alex Mercer's path to retribution. The process of rebuilding Alex's memories involves piecing together the 'Web of Intrigue', a series of nodes that represent the memories of the people whom Alex 'consumes'. Yes, Alex has the ability to consume key targets (by killing them and literally absorbing their remains) within the game world, and in doing so, he gains their knowledge (Alex can improve his abilities by doing so, such as his ability to drive armoured vehicles and to use military weapons) and memories. Those memories then point Alex in the direction of his next objective, and this is how most of the missions in the game are presented to the player. Consuming folks also grants Alex the ability to disguise himself as his hapless victim, useful for evading pursuers or for gaining access to restricted areas (consuming certain military officers will allow you to gain access to military bases, for example). Alex has the ability to transform and 'shape-shift' parts of his body into living weapons of mass destruction, such as transforming one of his arms into a deadly blade with which to slice up his enemies.

As you play through the game's story, you'll earn EP (Evolution Points) that

can be used to purchase new abilities or upgrade existing ones. Scattered around New York are a number of side missions that can be played, each of which will earn the player some extra EP. These side missions come in a few flavours: some of them task players with killing a certain amount of enemies within a time limit, while others require that you race against the clock to hit a number of waypoints scattered along a predetermined route (basically, a 'race-to-the-checkpoint-style' mission). In between missions, the player is free to roam around the city, leaving chaos and destruction in his/her wake. The superpowers on offer are a blast to use, and each one that is unlocked is more impressive than the last (especially the 'Devastator' attacks, which are Alex's most powerful abilities: one of these causes hundreds of tendrils to erupt from Alex and destroy everything in the area around him). Everything about the game screams 'over the top', and it's absolutely brilliant. The game's physics are unrealistic, the action is improbable, and everything about the game is just a reckless disregard for any form of realism. However, if you need your games to be grounded in reality and based on scientific fact in order to have fun, then I think you're doing it wrong.

PROTOTYPE certainly isn't perfect. It's not the best-looking game I've ever seen (the visuals are actually quite bland and uninspiring), but the amount of chaos the game's engine is capable of displaying on screen (without any frame-rate drops) is absolutely awe-inspiring. So, there's no point in complaining about the game's graphics: the amount of beautiful destruction that takes place more than makes up for it. The game's missions (the story and side missions) can get stupidly repetitive, and once you've infiltrated your hundredth military base, the experience can get a bit stale. None of these problems manages to ruin the experience in any way, because *PROTOTYPE* never stops offering up the crazy, unlimited fun that games are supposed to provide. *PROTOTYPE*'s greatness can be summed up in one sentence: you can 'elbow-drop' tanks and hijack helicopters mid-flight. If you can't see the appeal in that, then you're on your own. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

The Score

1
 N/A
 N/A
 18+

Plus

- + Ridiculously fun
- + Amazing superpowers
- + 'elbow-drop' tanks

Minus

- Can get slightly repetitive
- Meaningless story

Bottom Line

PROTOTYPE, despite its minor problems, is simply too much fun to put down. You'd be crazy not to try this game.

AVAILABLE AT

Look & Listen

For the Fans

Developer→ Terminal Reality **Publisher**→ Sony Computer Entertainment Europe
Distributor→ Ster-Kinekor Entertainment **Web**→ www.ghostbustersgame.com



Don't cross the streams, at a urinal, or anywhere else

Ghostbusters: The Video Game

Movies and games living together. Mass hysteria!

Genre→ Third-Person Action Adventure
 PC 360 **PS3** Wii PS2 PSP DS

IT WOULD BE AN understatement to say that the expectations for this game were high. To have so much riding on a game based on a franchise as beloved as this, one must have created many sleepless nights for the developers of *Ghostbusters: The Video Game*. Thankfully, now that I've had a chance to put the title to the test, I have to say: rest easy, Terminal Reality, for you have succeeded in creating a game that is fun, funny and manages to stay true to everything that makes *Ghostbusters* great.

Dan Aykroyd (one of the franchise's creators) went on record and said it: this is essentially the third *Ghostbusters* movie, albeit in an interactive format. The player assumes the role of a character known only as the "Rookie," a new recruit to the Ghostbusters (who, for those of you who – somehow – don't know, are a bunch of paranormal investigators who specialise in ridding New York City of all manner of supernatural phenomena). At the start of the game, you're introduced to the other Ghostbusters on their home turf: the Ghostbusters HQ, that iconic renovated fire station that has been lovingly recreated in the game world, right down to Venkman's 'office' and the containment unit in the building's basement. It's 'at this time' that you meet your fellow busters/colleagues: Peter Venkman, Egon Spengler, Ray Stantz and Winston Zeddemore. Each of the Ghostbusters is voiced by their respective actors (their likenesses have also been captured in the game) from the movies (Bill Murray, Harold Ramis, Dan Aykroyd and Ernie Hudson), and some other familiar voices/actors reprise their roles as characters from the movies. Aside from



the Ghostbusters themselves, it's brilliant to hear the voice of Annie Potts breathing life into the character of Janine Melnitz (the Ghostbuster's receptionist) once again, along with the voices of William Atherton, Alyssa Milano and Brian Doyle-Murray (who play characters Walter Peck, Dr Illyssa Selwyn and Mayor Mulligan). All the familiar faces (and the new ones, who enhance the title's great presentation) add to the game's nostalgic value, and the developers have managed to capture the sights, sounds and feel of the *Ghostbusters* world perfectly.

The game's story also has that familiar (and quirky) *Ghostbusters* flavour. It's set in 1991, two years after the events of the second movie. After Slimer (another iconic 'character', who has been replicated in the game) escapes from the HQ, the team sets out to the Sedgewick Hotel, the site where Slimer was first captured. From here on out, the team discovers a paranormal conspiracy that threatens the city, and you'll get to join the team on their quest to put a stop to it. Plenty of recognisable names like Gozer the Gozerian are thrown around throughout the story, and you even get to see some familiar ghosts, like the ghost in the library (also known as the



Multiplayer bustin'

The Xbox 360 and PS3 versions of the game feature an online, cooperative multiplayer mode that lets you join up with three other players in missions (each of which has their own unique objectives) separate to those in the single-player game. The Wii version of the game lets two players play through the entire single-player campaign together.



"Gray Lady" - the very first ghost the team attempted to bust). I won't risk letting any spoilers slip free, but rest assured that the story is great and is instantly recognisable as a *Ghostbusters* tale (which is understandable, because it was written by Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis).

The best way to describe the gameplay is to call it *Gears of War* with Proton Packs and detective work thrown into the mix. Most of the combat in the game involves the Ghostbuster's three-step method of "sap 'em, cap 'em and trap 'em." The first step involves draining a ghost of energy (i.e. depleting their health bar), which you do by using your Proton Pack's various modes of fire. The second requires that you use the Proton Pack's capture stream to grab a ghost, which will allow you to toss them around the environment to tire them out and eventually drag them towards a deployed trap. The final step requires that you position a captured ghost above a trap and keep it within the trap's capture cone until the ghost is fully drawn into it. Not all enemies need to be dealt with this way: some of them simply need to be beaten down enough so that they dissipate and return to whatever ghostly dimension they came from. As you progress through the game, your Proton Pack is upgraded with new modes of fire (to a total of four, each with a primary and secondary function), and each spirit/ghost/freakish enemy is usually weak to a specific mode, adding a bit of strategy to the combat. You're also given access to a trusty PKE Meter, which can be used to scan the environment (and ghosts/enemies, which will reveal their reasons for being and their weaknesses/attacks) for clues. The meter's scan signature changes colour, based on what you're scanning for: green means a spectral anomaly is close; red means

there's a hidden ghost around; and blue shows that a "Cursed Artifact" is nearby. Those Cursed Artifacts are the game's collectable items, and collecting them earns you extra cash. In addition, the new item appears back at the HQ (such as a pair of pants that follows you around the headquarters), slowly building the Ghostbuster's collection of strange and awesome items. Speaking of earning money, the game has an upgrade system that allows you to purchase upgrades for your items by spending money you've earned, such as damage increases and recoil decreases for the Proton Pack's firing modes.

All of this adds up to a wonderfully enjoyable game that does the franchise proud. Everything about the game screams *Ghostbusters* - from the very first time that you gaze upon the might of the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man to Venkman's trademark brand of sarcastic comments, each and every part of the game has been created with the fans in mind. The visuals are amazing: the particle effects are beautiful, colourful and recognisable; the environments are rich and suitably epic; and the character models are spot on and animated spectacularly (particularly the facial animations: they're brilliant). The soundtrack warrants a special mention, because it's filled with some very familiar tunes and sound effects that are sure to evoke a nostalgic response, and the voice acting is naturally fantastic. The game certainly isn't perfect and it suffers from some repetition in the combat and other aspects of gameplay, but it remains a fun-filled and phenomenally hilarious adventure with some old friends by your side.

NAG
Dane Remendes

The Score

1
2-4
N/A
www.pegi.info

Plus

- + It's essentially *Ghostbusters III*
- + Fun gameplay

Minus

- Somewhat repetitive

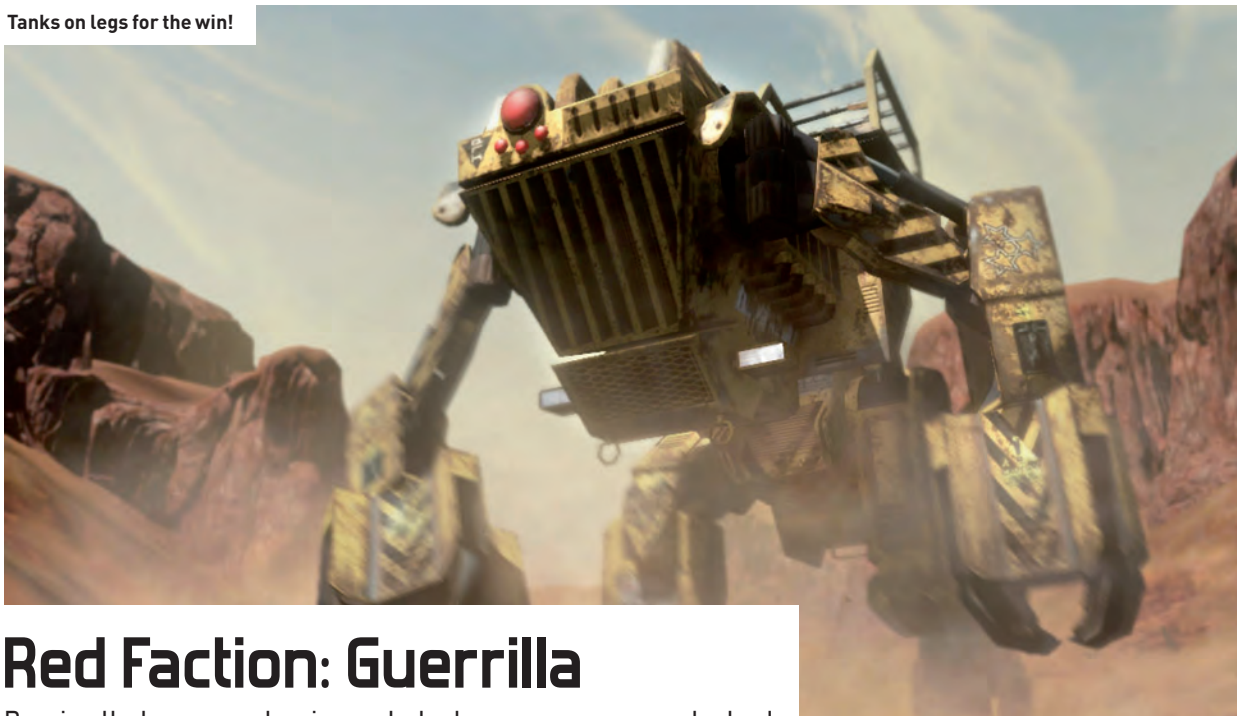
Bottom Line

Bustin' makes me feel good...

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans



Tanks on legs for the win!



Red Faction: Guerrilla

Proving that a game starring a sledgehammer can never be bad

Genre→ Action

PC 360 **PS3** Wii PS2 PSP DS

SET IN THE YEAR 2120, *Red Faction: Guerrilla* tells the story of Alec Mason, a mining engineer seeking only to make an honest living, who quickly finds himself entangled in a bitter struggle for the very freedom of his new home world. Having only recently arrived at the Martian colony, Alec discovers that his brother is, in fact, a member of the Red Faction, a group of freedom fighters battling against the Earth Defense Force and the oppressive hold it exerts over the Martian colonists. Although Alec wants no part in the conflict, after the EDF brutally murders his brother, it's clear that Alec will soon become their next target; and he's left with no one other than the Red Faction to turn to. The premise behind the story is typical sci-fi fare, with a hint of political undertone thrown in, and if not for the game's flat, uninteresting characters and lackluster story development, it might have provided some thoughtful underpinning for the wanton carnage that pervades *Guerrilla*'s play dynamic. Nonetheless, the aforementioned wanton carnage manages to be entertaining enough that the shabbily presented plot doesn't detract too heavily from the overall experience of playing Volition's newest title.

In a departure from series tradition, *Guerrilla* is not a first-person shooter, but rather a third-person action title, set in an open-ended sandbox environment, not entirely dissimilar to games such as *Grand Theft Auto*. The Martian environment is divided into six sectors, all of which are initially under EDF control.

By undertaking a variety of missions in each sector, you'll gradually build up the 'Morale' rating of the resistance, while also gradually reducing the EDF's control in that region. As Morale increases, you'll gain easier access to ammunition and supplies, as well as allied support troops to help you with certain missions. Once you've sufficiently lowered the EDF control in any sector, you'll unlock a final liberation mission for that region, which will permanently place the area under the Red Faction's governance.

Missions are easily selectable via the convenient map, which also aids you in navigating through the large environment to your next objective. The missions are also quite varied, with objectives that include simple demolition runs, hostage rescues, and vehicle-based missions. Fortunately, aside from the few critical missions that advance the plot, you're given free choice over which missions to undertake, as well as the order in which you tackle them, effectively allowing you to focus on whichever missions you find most enjoyable.

The game dynamic itself is 'typical' for a third-person action title, with close-quarters firearm-based combat being the order of the day. What sets *Guerrilla* apart from other titles in its genre, however, is the focus the game places on destroying enemy buildings and structures. In addition to a standard selection of guns and assault rifles, your character is also armed with a destructive sledgehammer, as well as having access to a vast repertoire of explosive charges. By chipping away at support beams, or blowing up crucial weight-bearing walls, you're able to send entire buildings crumbling to the ground, and it's this wholesale mayhem that makes *Red*





Faction: Guerrilla so entertaining. The game does a superb job of making you feel like you're actually in control of some significant destructive capabilities, and watching a building waver and tremble before finally hurtling Earthwards (or is that Marswards?) in a heap of rubble is immensely satisfying - particularly in the early stages of the game.

Once the lustre of indiscriminate 'building-butcery' has worn off, the tedium of the open-world exploration starts to set in, as even the varied missions on the Spartan Mars landscape start to feel somewhat repetitive. Fortunately, though, this lull is a short-lived one, as the game soon rewards you with more varied and exciting weaponry to keep the game interesting. Throughout the game, you'll be accumulating 'Salvage' - *Guerrilla*'s version of currency. Once you've accumulated enough, you can use it to purchase new weapons and armour, as well as certain special abilities, such as the option to warp directly between different rebel safe houses; which cuts out a lot of the tedium associated with traversing the large, dreary distances between your objectives.

Guerrilla also offers a hefty selection of multiplayer options, including such online staples as Team Deathmatches and Capture-the-Flag modes, as well as a few more-inventive modes that force you to guard and repair your own structures, while simultaneously trying to level those of your opponents to the ground. There's also an innovative offline mode called 'Wrecking Crew', a pass-the-controller mode that lets up to four players take turns in causing as much damage as possible within a fixed time limit.

Visually, *Red Faction: Guerrilla* offers some well-detailed characters and convincing lighting effects, though the massive landscapes are 'hampered' by some uninspired art direction. Although the environments are rendered in sufficient detail, the entire colony comes off feeling very Spartan and desolate, and never manages to recreate the same sense of life that sandbox-set games depend on. It's understandable that the developers wanted to portray the Martian landscape as a utilitarian setting, designed more for function than for form; but moving from one dusty, red landscape to another dusty, red landscape soon becomes tedious. Nonetheless, the prowess with which explosions and crumbling buildings are portrayed is exceedingly convincing, thanks in no small part to Volition's physics engine, which brings an uncanny sense of realism to all of the mindless destruction that permeates the game.

Guerrilla marks an entertaining current-generation debut for the *Red Faction* series, as well as a successful transition from first- to third-person action. Although somewhat crippled by its ineffective storytelling, *Red Faction: Guerrilla* never skimps on the action. It's not an epic space opera, but it doesn't try to be. This is a game that's all about causing chaos and destruction. And in this regard, it does exceedingly well - the result is an incredibly enjoyable one. With impressive multiplayer options and a variety of locked content, *Red Faction: Guerrilla* makes up for its lack of depth with momentum, pace and plenty of explosive action. **NAG**

Adam Liebman



The Score

1-4	2-16	2-8	16+
www.pegi.info			

Plus

- + Pure destructive carnage
- + Open-ended

Minus

- Occasionally tedious
- Lacklustre plot

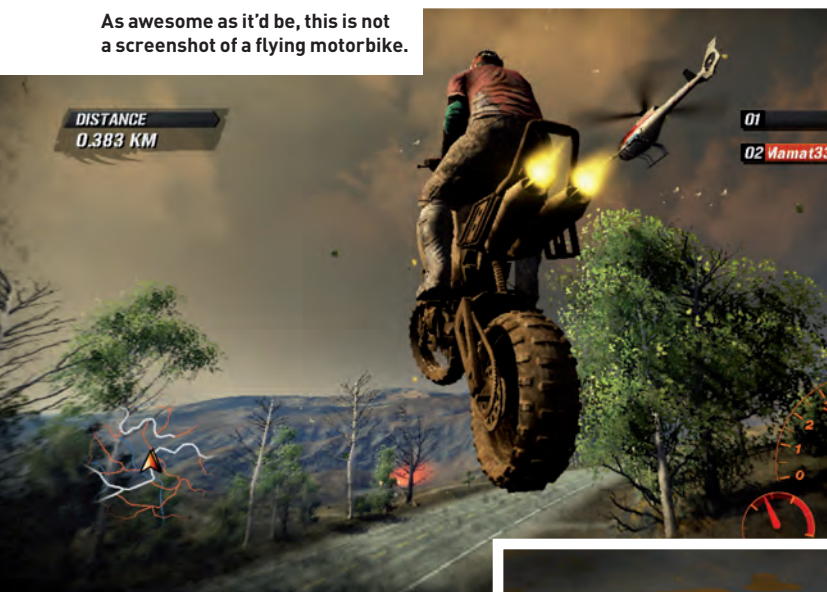
Bottom Line

Red Faction: Guerrilla succeeds stunningly as an exercise in open-ended third-person mayhem.

AVAILABLE AT
Look @ Listen
For the Fun



As awesome as it'd be, this is not a screenshot of a flying motorbike.



Fuel

Going nowhere slowly

Genre→ Racing

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

IF YOU'VE EVER HAD the pleasure of playing the 1998 racing title *Powerslide*, you're no doubt aware that there's no better way to enjoy the post-apocalyptic wastelands than in a 'souped-up' death machine. In *Fuel*, the apocalypse is caused by humankind's retreat into eco-friendly cities. They've abandoned the open world and their fuel supplies, safe in the knowledge that they're no longer needed. In this future, there is no law, there are no innocent bystanders, and there is lots of fuel just sitting around, begging to be burnt.

There's also a massive (world record-breaking, in fact) game world that needs exploring – over 14,000km². To give you a sense of just how big that is, the game world is divided into 19 zones, and each can take ten to fifteen minutes to drive through (sometimes even longer). Each zone has its dominant theme, ranging from desert to mountains to dense forests, which are occasionally on fire. To get you through these zones is a selection of 70 vehicles from six different classes, ranging from motorbikes to trucks. Cruising across the open world in free-roam mode is quite entertaining at first, but does become a bit boring once the novelty has worn off. The vehicles move at a decent pace, and all feature convincing physics and driver animations that give them a real sense of weight.

It's the racing that really counts, however; and in this regard, *Fuel* is a bit of a letdown. The race modes vary from tight, multi-checkpoint affairs to long stretches of highway with a single fleeing opponent down at the other



end - and everything in between. It's the majority of the actual race modes that are disappointing, though. The AI is the dull, drive-in-a-line-and-wait-to-be-overtaken variety that never engages with the player, and the track design varies from decent to fiendishly unfair in a matter of seconds. If this was *Burnout* - or really any other racing game - crashing would be fine: you'd either be rewarded with an entertaining animation, or would be promptly plopped back on the track and out of harm's way. Not here, however. *Fuel*'s ultra-sensitive crash detection chooses to instead throw an immersion-shattering load screen at you every time you stub your toe, propping you back on the track (sometimes with the camera facing the wrong way), with no idea of how you'd dropped five places. Despite the appeal of open-world racing events with only a handful of checkpoints, they quickly become tedious with penalties this severe, forcing you to choose the safest path rather than the more entertaining alternatives.

Fuel is a bit of an odd game, because it so clumsily staggers the line between simulation and arcade title. If the tracks

focused a little less on tight turning that relies on repeated attempts to perfect, the AI was more engaging, and there was a bigger emphasis on stunts, boosting and crashing, it'd be a great arcade racer. On the other hand, improved vehicle customisation, a smarter AI, and a more interactive environment would shove this title neatly into the action/simulation genre. As it stands, *Fuel* fails to get the mix right at almost every attempt.

NAG
Geoff Burrows

The Score



Plus

- + Fantastic visuals
- + Massive game world

Minus

- Irritating track design
- Dull AI
- Poor audio

Bottom Line

While not entirely un-enjoyable, *Fuel* is an acceptable arcade racer at the best of times.

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

68

ONE OF THREE

GUITAR HERO METALLICA **HAMPERS FROM MEGAROM!**



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- Winners will be notified by phone
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megarom
interactive



When players are bored they can take potshots at the pigeons



Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood

Take three steps forward, then take three steps back...

Genre→ First-Person Shooter

PC 360 **PS3** Wii PS2 PSP DS

THE ORIGINAL *CALL OF JUAREZ* was a cool game, all told, with some very interesting characters – particularly the Bible-bashing, six-gun-toting Reverend Ray. He was so cool (in that mean, nasty way) that Techland decided to tell his story in the form of a new *Call of Juarez* game. That's right, *Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood* is a prequel title, but in terms of technology, it's very much a sequel.

The game tells the tale of the McCall brothers, Thomas and Ray (who will later become... yeah, you got it). After deserting their posts as Confederate soldiers during the Civil War to go and protect their homestead, they begin a journey in search of the legendary treasure of Juarez. The money, they figure, can go a long way in rebuilding the family home to its former glory. Joined by their younger brother, they take to the Wild West in a bloody and brutal battle to feed their greed. The player gets to use both Ray and Thomas during the game, and can choose which brother to use at the start of most missions. Ray is an up-close powerhouse, brutal and in your face, while Thomas tends towards stealthier, distance-based fighting. Both brothers also have unique 'bullet-time' abilities: Ray can 'paint' several targets before blasting off a hail of bullets, while Thomas will take a snap shot at every enemy in sight.

The best is that, aside from a few moments when the player is forced to use one brother or the other, they can approach the game in the exact way that they feel comfortable with. The game will take around ten hours to get through, with lots of action for the player to take



advantage of, before moving on to some rather compelling multiplayer options.

There have been numerous improvements made to the title, and the game feels pretty good, save for a few technical issues that keep it from achieving true greatness. For example, the graphics look great at a distance, but getting up close, leaves a bit to be desired. The gun fighting is great, with a real haphazard feel to it. But duels can be tricky and a little annoying, relying on the player's speed and accuracy in situations where the game may give the player less advantage than it should. This leads to unnecessary and frustrating deaths.

Additionally, the folks whom the player shoots at aren't varied enough, with the same faces repeated time and again – not a massive problem, but one that 'breaks' the illusion a bit.

Most annoying, though, is a problem that is 'endemic' to the PlayStation 3 version (the PC and Xbox 360 versions don't suffer from this). The game will freeze for a few seconds every time the player reaches a checkpoint. In a game

that is already pretty heavy in terms of loading, it breaks the pace in a rather horrible fashion.

Still, the game is fun, and the complex story it tells is well put together. It would have been better if the technical issues hadn't crept in, but those who can be a little forgiving on the title will more than likely enjoy it. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

The Score



Plus

- + Awesome story
- + Tons of action
- + Nice multiplayer

Minus

- Too much loading
- Game freezes at checkpoints

Bottom Line

A potential classic laid low by a few technical issues. This is a fun but frustrating title.

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans



Developer→Luxoflux Publisher→Activision
Distributor→Megarom Web→www.transformersgame.com



Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen

Autobots roll out!

Genre→Third-Person Action

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

HOT ON THE HEELS of the film's release, *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* is what is commonly known as "a shameless cash-in." While it's not quite a terrible game, *Transformers* does little to stand above the hordes of perfectly reasonable games out there; instead, it too heavily depends on the film's success to make up for its fairly boring gameplay.

The two campaigns (one for the Autobots and the other for the Decepticons) take place across 14 different zones (each with a few sub-missions) from the film. Instead of a purely linear storyline, the game gives you a semi-linear mission-selection process. Unfortunately, the majority of missions end up being non-critical to the storyline, and feel more like filler than anything interesting. This is mostly because almost every mission plays out the same: enter the area, kill a number of enemies at the objective, perform whatever task is required of you (such as repairing a satellite by holding down the B button or rescuing a stranded civilian, also by holding down the B button), and move on to the next objective. On top of that, the two campaigns are almost identical.

The combat can be fun, but only if you really put in the effort. The easiest (and often the quickest) way to take down an enemy is simply to stand at a distance and shoot at them while standing still. But if you perform all the fancy tricks, such as mid-air transformations and 'mix ranged' with the limited selection of melee attacks, you'll at least produce an entertaining-looking fight.

All is not lost, however; fans of the series might be pleased to know that there's a great selection of locked bonuses, including a handful of original *Transformers* episodes and a collection of artwork. The transformers themselves are also pleasantly diverse. The ten playable characters boast a range of weaponry and admittedly look quite good, which is more than can be said for the environments.

NAG
Geoff Burrows



Bottom Line

Not much more than meets the eye.



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You sunk my battleship!



Battlestations: Pacific

ET? Miss... Does anybody else remember epic cheating in Battleship?

Genre→ RTS/Simulation

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

DIDN'T PLAY THE RELEASE version of *Battlestations: Midway*. It was one of those titles that, while the premise intrigued me and the demos were enough to make me want the game, managed to slip under my radar and creep just out of range of my sonar [Groan, Ed]. The basic idea goes something like this: the game is set during World War II, but you're not taking control of an infantryman fighting his way towards offing Hitler and ending the war. In *Battlestations: Pacific*, you control the naval forces of the US and Japanese armies. This means that you take direct control of various aircraft and naval units (there is a huge amount of different units in the game, each with their own statistics and attributes), and you also have the ability to control all of these units on a larger scale. It's a unique mix of simulation and real-time strategy/tactics, something that not many games out there can claim to feature. While the one-of-a-kind nature of this title is its greatest strength, it's also its most crippling weakness, because the title falls into a very niche market and appeals to very specific personal tastes.

The game offers a number of ways to play. In terms of single-player gameplay, there are two campaigns on offer (one for the Japanese forces and another for the US), as well as a skirmish mode, which essentially offers the chance to test out the game's multiplayer mode against the AI. The two campaigns on offer allow you to relive (or rewrite) history, and boast some pretty historic battles in the missions on offer. The first mission in the Japanese campaign, for example, gives

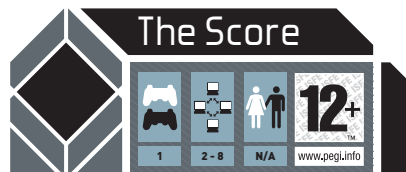


you control over various Japanese aircraft in the surprise attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941. *Battlestations: Pacific's* greatest problem is its learning curve. It's not that the game is difficult – it's just not well documented and the in-game tutorial doesn't actually teach you anything, so it may take a while for you to learn everything that you need to know to play the game. This may scare away new players who are put off by all the "OMG difficult controllz0rz," naturally forcing them to immediately destroy the game's disc, spit on the remains, and sulk in the corner, while weeping uncontrollably. If you manage to get past this initially frightening stage, then you'll see that the game has a lot to offer, especially in the skirmish/multiplayer department. While the single-player campaigns generally don't allow much freedom, certain multiplayer modes (such as 'Island Capture', which requires that you capture islands on the game map, giving you access to new units and production facilities, as well as extra resources with which to buy new units) give you a massive amount of control over battles, letting you

direct units, squadrons and entire fleets in large-scale battles – much like an RTS, except that you can assume direct control of individual units. The game's uniqueness makes for a brilliantly fun experience that looks absolutely fantastic, sounds decent (aside from the voice acting, most of which is appalling) and plays well. If this sounds like your type of game, try it – you won't be disappointed.

NAG
Dane Remendes

The Score



Plus

- + Unique game mechanics
- + Surprisingly fun

Minus

- Needlessly steep learning curve
- Scary voice acting

Bottom Line

Battlestations: Pacific is a wonderfully unique title that offers a great mix of different gameplay styles. However, it does have its flaws.

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans



Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

It's all potions and duels at Hogwarts this time around

Genre → Third-Person Adventure

PC 360 **PS3** Wii PS2 PSP DS

HARRY POTTER AND THE *Half-Blood Prince*, based on the upcoming movie of the same name, which (in turn) is based on the book of the same name, falls into the category of 'pretty good' for a movie game and 'not too bad' for games in general. Those of you who have read the *Harry Potter* books will know what to expect, while those who haven't will have to see the film. But the game won't tell you the story, either way. In fact, instead of playing through the major events of the story, it uses them as grounding points, while allowing the player to experience life at Hogwarts.

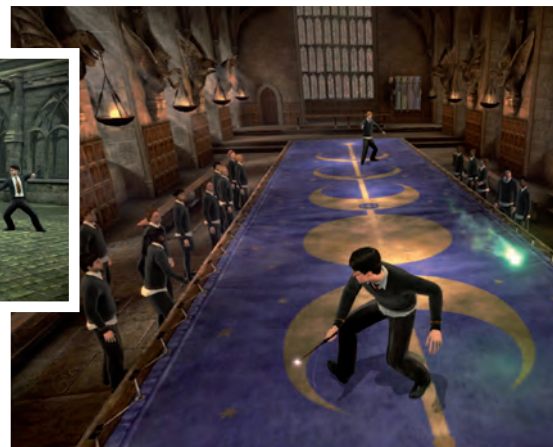
There are four principle activities for the player to partake in: making potions, spell duelling, flying around on a broom and exploring the grounds. The enjoyment of these is roughly the same as the order they were mentioned in. Potion making is a simple but highly enjoyable and challenging mini game, which requires the player to follow a prescribed series of in-game actions (against the clock) to successfully make various potions.



Duelling is far more 'action packed' than before, with a number of spells available to the player to best opponents with. The flying is little more than getting Harry to the right place on the screen as the camera follows the snitch, because the player has to fly through checkpoints during these events. And as for the exploring, well, there's a lot of it, with numerous collectables to be found and sights for *Potter* geeks to enjoy in the perfectly recreated Hogwarts.

On the whole, it is an enjoyable game, but naturally aimed more towards the casual market than the hardcore. The game is never really challenging, but it does provide quite a lot of fun and a lot to do.

NAG
Walt Pretorius



The Score



AVAILABLE AT
Look Listen
Fuel the Fans

Bottom Line

While it's not the greatest game on the planet, the latest Harry Potter effort is certainly the best in the series.



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Crispy new graphics, pity about the backgrounds...



SBK 09: Superbike World Championship

Tight cornering on the track and on the market

Genre→ Racing

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

RACING GAMES COME IN all shapes and sizes these days, so it is not necessary to resort to enthusiast-level titles. In other words, you don't have to buy a game based on the Formula 1 season to do some track racing in a fast car – except, of course, if you want to do some track racing on a fast bike. Then your choices are severely limited. That's probably the biggest problem with *SBK 09* – the fact that it is one of very few motorcycle-racing simulations on the market. See, in order to get a fix of two-wheel speed, you need to play this game, and the developers get to dictate the exact terms of the experience. Lack of competition does that.

Not that this is a bad experience. *SBK 09* is a solid game and a definite improvement over *SBK 08*. It's just that (and perhaps I am being very picky here) I would like to have a choice of more than two riders. I might even want to create my own rider, just for the hell of it. Then again, I am not a Superbike World Championship enthusiast... I just like racing games. Those who follow the real-world competition will probably enjoy using their favourite riders.

The biggest change to the game is in terms of graphics. Although the backdrops still look flat and nasty, the tracks and bikes look much better, with the vehicles now also displaying damage – something that was conspicuously absent before. The sound hasn't improved too much, although the sound track is much better than the last outing.

The intimidating technicality of *SBK 08* has been balanced by a nice arcade mode this time around, but the controls



for that are just too simple: the game isn't challenging enough in arcade mode. On the other hand, getting all the nuts and bolts laid out, in terms of full simulation controls and bike tweaking, makes things very challenging indeed.

The plain fact is that *SBK 09* will appeal to you, or it won't. It's a decent enough game, with good simulation factors like physics and such, but unless you're head over heels in love with superbike racing, it probably won't blow your skirt up too much. The game can be very technical, or very simple, with not too much middle ground, meaning that people who want a decent, yet uncomplicated title may find it a little wanting. Enthusiasts will doubtlessly love it, but it won't do much to appeal to those who are keen, rather than rabid.

Still, it's a solid title with a lot of promise, and the unquestionable grip it has on the market puts it in a very strong position indeed. This is a game that will

do well because it answers a demand that others do not. Thankfully, the developers are putting a bit of work into the title, rather than taking advantage of the situation. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



The Score



Plus

- + Corners the market
- + Better graphics

Minus

- Not enough freedom
- Can be very complex

Bottom Line

A decent racing simulator made more appealing by the fact that it is rather unique.

AVAILABLE AT
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For the Fans

78

Worms 2: Armageddon

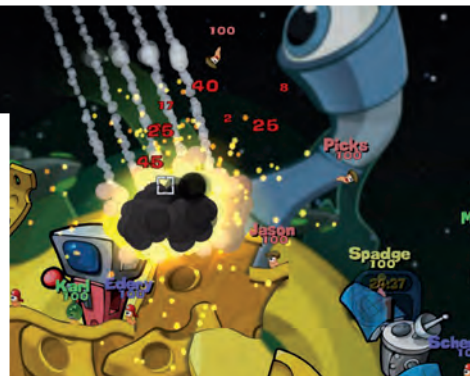
Wiggly invertebrates, heavy ordinance

Genre→ Strategy

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

WORMSHASN'T REALLY CHANGED much at all since I played the original on PC back in 1995. Usually, that would be a precursor to some disparaging narrative of the game's naive irrelevance and Team 17's criminal lack of ingenuity; but no. The thing is, a game entirely 'involved' with worms chucking hand grenades and napalm strikes at each other **just works**. Fourteen years and fifteen titles in, and that simple formula is still working just fine, thanks. They've stopped mucking about with all that 3D rubbish, though, so it's back to the old 2D Plateau O' Death we love the most.

Elsewhere, it's the usual roll-out of worm squads fighting it out for total garden domination - or whatever it is the little pink insurgents are fighting for. There's a single-player campaign comprising 35 missions, including a number of rather 'fiendish' puzzle stages; and completing these earns you a bunch of tokens you can swap out for hats and weapons and other junk your worms want. The real game's in the multiplayer, though, and this one's a house party. There's four-way local multiplayer



(with support for just a single controller, naturally), featuring Standard, Forts, Crazy Crates, and custom game modes, while LIVE multiplayer offers pretty much the same stuff online.

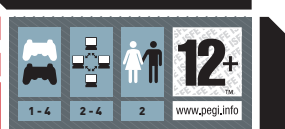
While I love this game to itty-bitty, exploded chunky bits, it's unfortunately packing some annoying online connection bugs - getting more than two players into a private game has so far proved entirely impossible, while the game lobby suffers from occasional lock-ups. These gripes aside, *Worms 2: Armageddon* is about the best possible investment you can make for your next weekend. If you have an Xbox 360, and you have friends, and you have 800 Microsoft Points in your pocket, you really have no legitimate reason

whatsoever for not rushing onto the Marketplace and purchasing this game immediately. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl



The Score



AVAILABLE AT
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Bottom Line

Any game that has a weapon called The Buffalo of Lies is going to automatically be totally the best thing ever.





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1,800 NAG LAN @ rAge tickets go on sale at Computicket on 1 August

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which includes free access to the expo.
The LAN opens at 10:00 on Friday [2 October 2009]
and closes 15:00 on Sunday [4 October 2009]

2-4 October '09
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www.rageexpo.co.za

rAge
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COMPUTERS | GAMING | TECHNOLOGY

Some Rules

- What to bring: your PC, monitor, keyboard, mouse, headphones, power cord to PC and monitor;
- You must have a valid Computicket ticket to enter. You must ask for the NAG LAN ticket at Computicket and then check that your ticket states NAG LAN. Tickets for the NAG LAN will not be available at the door;
- Seating arrangements are on a first-come-first-served basis, thus you will not be able to reserve specific seating at Computicket
- Computers are allowed to be brought in and removed between 10:00 and 22:00 on Friday and 08:00 and 22:00 on Saturday. This is a security issue and will not be changed for any reason. We want to keep your equipment safe, so you have to play the game by our rules;
- Secure public parking is available for anyone who has a NAG LAN ticket;
- You may not plug in phone chargers or any other power-requiring device. This causes technical issues. We only have so much power to go around for each individual gamer, and pushing the limits trips the switches;
- We only use red plugs at the LAN, so make sure that you purchase one before you arrive, as other plugs will not be allowed;
- No port scanning, hacking or cheating allowed. Try anything like this, and you'll be escorted out of the event and banned from ever attending again;
- No food or alcohol is allowed to be brought into the Coca-Cola Dome [their rules];
- No speakers, multi-plugs, double adapters, switches or hubs allowed;
- No tents allowed [no jokes - some people think this is a camping site];
- Right of admission is always reserved.

For more detailed information on the dos and don'ts, and to find out what else is happening or to ask a question, go to the forums at <http://forums.tidemia.co.za/nag>, then scroll down to the rAge section and click on the link. If you're still confused after all of this reading and you have an important question to ask, then phone us during office hours on (011) 704-2679 or e-mail us at rage@tidemia.co.za.

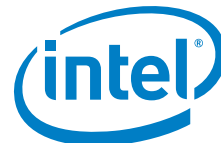


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Carmageddon

THE TROUBLE WITH RACING games these days is that they're too focused on esoteric junk such as tyre classes, torque, parabolic sub-supersonic mechanics, and hot chicks in bikinis. The genre is bloated with supercilious authenticity and self-importance, 'choking' on franchises like *Gran Turismo* and *Forza*. Games that tout every sort of ultra-realistic simulated driving feature alongside all the drab inevitability of a trip to the shop to buy toilet paper. Games that are technically very impressive, but with all the charisma and appeal of cold vomit.

The thing is, if you can't murder innocent pedestrians and bystanders, then what's the point of a racing game really? This is a question the concept-design guys over at Stainless must've asked themselves at some important meeting back in 1995 or thereabout. And, in one pivotal moment in gaming history, the question was answered simply and profoundly: "None whatsoever." *Carmageddon* was born.

Rather than mucking about with pointless dribble like actual racing, *Carmageddon* pitted players as Max Damage, a guy who drove over stuff to get to the top - brutal, elegant, and really rather practical. The idea was to keep driving over stuff until you made your way

from a grotty number 99 all the way to number 1 on the rankings. On the way up, you earned yourself cash to bolt stuff onto your car to help you drive over stuff better, including armour, power, and offensive enhancements. Stuff didn't stand a chance against your stuff.

Predictably, of course, *Carmageddon* quickly landed itself in a whole wobbly heap of controversy. Apparently, driving over stuff in videogames wasn't cool with ratings boards, even though movies had been doing it since forever - including *Death Race 2000*, the film on which the game had been originally based. Over in Germany, censors insisted that all the people be replaced with robots, while in other regions, they were substituted with zombies (driving over dead people is okay). In the UK, publisher SCI had intended to drum up some publicity for the game by submitting it to the British Board of Film Classification for an 18 rating, only to have this cheap marketing plan foiled by the organisation's refusal to classify the game until all the yucky bits were removed. It took another ten months of appeals before the BBFC finally relented and certified the game for release. **NAG**

Bumps in the road

Carmageddon started out as a regular sort of destruction-derby game. Then it was a *Mad Max* game. Then that licensing deal fell through, and a new licensing deal for a *Death Race 2020* 'game-of-the-movie' was signed. But *Death Race 2020* the movie was scrapped, and *Death Race 2020* the game was scrapped with it. So, Stainless decided to chuck all the volatile licensing rubbish and call it *Carmageddon* instead.



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Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Tales of the Vampires

Format: Comic One-Shot | **Publisher:** Dark Horse | **Writer:** Becky Cloonan
Artist: Vasilis Lolos | **Price:** R28.95

THIS ONCE-OFF ISSUE IS a 'break' in the ongoing series of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season Eight*, and tells a story from the other side: that of a vampire's perspective. With vampires now the latest fad among society, after the vampire named Harmony Kendall starred in her own reality TV show, slayers now have to lurk in the shadows, as vampires are now commonly accepted and idolised by the human population. Humans seeking a high, a thrill in their otherwise mundane lives, look to vampires to give them a rush, but the vampires themselves are maybe not just the harmless celebrities whom they have been labelled, and sometimes the monster inside of them takes over. This latest series of *Buffy* has been widely popular (having been started by creator Joss Whedon to pick up the story where the TV series left off) and is now going into its twenty-sixth issue.



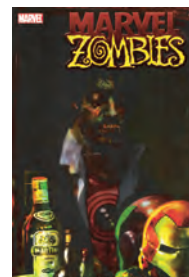
Clive Burmeister



Marvel Zombies Vol. 1

Format: Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** Marvel
Writer: Robert Kirkman | **Artist:** Sean Phillips | **Price:** R194.95

IN ANOTHER DIMENSION, WHICH resembles the Marvel Universe as we know it, an alien virus grips the super-powered community, turning them all into crazed flesh-eating zombies! They quickly devour most of the world's population in their overwhelming hunger for living flesh, and are then forced to scour the planet for any survivors who might be left. When a new threat looms over the planet, these 'monster parallels' of the characters we know see the new menace as a potential feast, rather than a potential disaster. *Marvel Zombies* is certainly something different in the overly flooded zombie market; and with the amazing artwork and ingenious writing that keep just enough of the Marvel heroes' personalities within the zombie characters, the book is a must read for superhero and zombie fans alike. It's also pretty grizzly (for a mainstream Marvel comic); the parental advisory on this book is there for a reason.



Clive Burmeister



The Art of Up

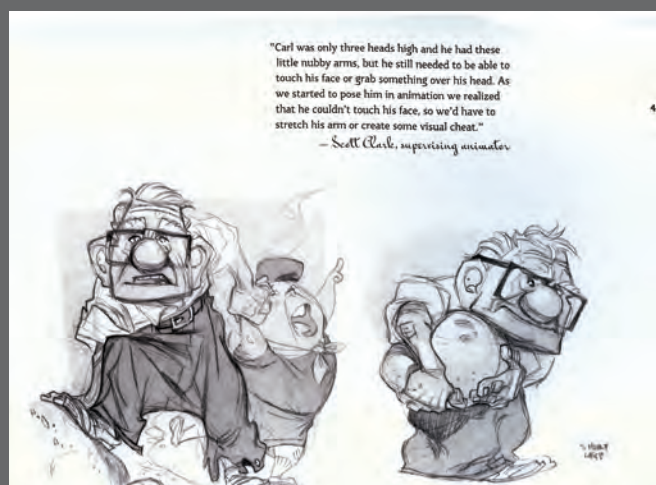
Format: Hardcover Book | **Publisher:** Chronicle Books
Writers: Tim Hauser | **Price:** R585

THE ART OF UP is the eighth book in Pixar's *Art of* series, and is definitely a must have for animators, artists or anyone else looking to gain some insight into the creative processes behind the doors of Pixar Studios. Written by Tim Hauser, the man behind *The Art of Wall-E*, the book goes into a fair bit of detail about a number of methods used in the creation of *Up*. It contains tons of images, from rough one-minute charcoal sketches to massive watercolours, to photos of character sculptures. As you might expect, there's also a great section on the creation of the house, from its derelict state in the flashbacks to its high-flying variant. Many of the illustrations are tagged in detail to show the reader exactly how much thought goes into even the tiny details that most people who watch the film will never notice.

There are also a number of comments from various members of the design crew, as well as an epic tale of their adventures into the Tepuis of Brazil. Even if you don't have an overwhelming interest in art or animation, getting inside the minds of the Pixar crew is almost as entertaining as watching their films.



Geoff Burrows



Predator #1

Format: Comic Series | **Publisher:** Dark Horse | **Writer:** John Arcudi
Artist: Javier Saltares | **Price:** R32.95

TO MARK THE TWENTIETH anniversary of the first time Dark Horse Comics printed a *Predator* story, they have released a new series based on the popular alien-hunter race, brought to fame by the 1987 science fiction movie starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. This new series of *Predator* is supposed to have a few new twists to it: the story, set in a war-torn battle zone, sees two enemy tribes facing off against each other. With the army already involved in a war of their own, things get chaotic and bloody very quickly. This first issue is fast paced and action packed, setting the scene early on and throwing the reader into the combat from the beginning. It does seem to lose a bit of the original plot of the *Predator* being the hunter looking for a challenge in favour of an all-out war, but we'll see how the tribal conflict ties into the story in later issues. For now, it's just good to see one of the most popular alien races back in a current comic series.



Clive Burmeister



Dark Reign: The Sinister Spider-Man #1 (of 4)

Format: Comic Miniseries | **Publisher:** Marvel | **Writer:** Brian Reed
Artist: Chris Bachalo | **Price:** R38.50

WITH NORMAN OSBORN, FORMERLY the Green Goblin, now in control of the Avengers, various superheroes in the spotlight are no longer who they seem. Among them is Spider-Man. When Mac Gargan, a super villain known as the Scorpion, bonded with the alien symbiote, Venom, it became even more powerful and inhumane than it was before. Now posing as the amazing Spider-Man in Osborn's Avengers, Venom reaches new lows as he murders and mutilates his victims and drags Spider-Man's persona through the mud with him. Even though 'Spider-Man' is more popular now than Peter Parker ever 'experienced', Gargan just can't seem to be content with the attention and girls, and just behave. Osborn is now becoming increasingly worried about the public image of his Avengers team, and a few of the reformed criminals who faced off against the new Spider-Man are out for revenge. Life for Mac Gargan is about to get a lot more interesting.



Clive Burmeister



G.I. Joe: Best of Hawk

Format: Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** IDW | **Writers:** Various
Artists: Various | **Price:** R245

IF YOU'RE YET TO see *G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra*, what better way to rekindle your childhood memories than with IDW's *Best of* series? This book, *Best of Hawk*, is a collection of six of G.I. Joe Commander, Clayton M. Abernathy's most impressive, most explosive, and most American moments throughout the classic *Joe* comic book range. Each issue 'is reprinted' perfectly from the original Marvel comics. Don't expect too much in terms of story quality, however, as these issues are scattered across the range - not that it's too challenging to figure out what's going on.

If you're on the lookout for a throwback to the days of old and aren't too bothered by the clichéd stories or cheesy dialogue, then this might be just the book for you. It really is cheesy - *Joe* always has been - but it manages to retain its charming 'boy book' feeling that should have you squealing with delight every time you recognise a character from your childhood toy bin. It's also quite appealing to read in terms of artwork. While the style certainly shows its age, the change in artists throughout the comic's history during the '80s and into the mid-'90s makes for some interesting comparisons.



Geoff Burrows

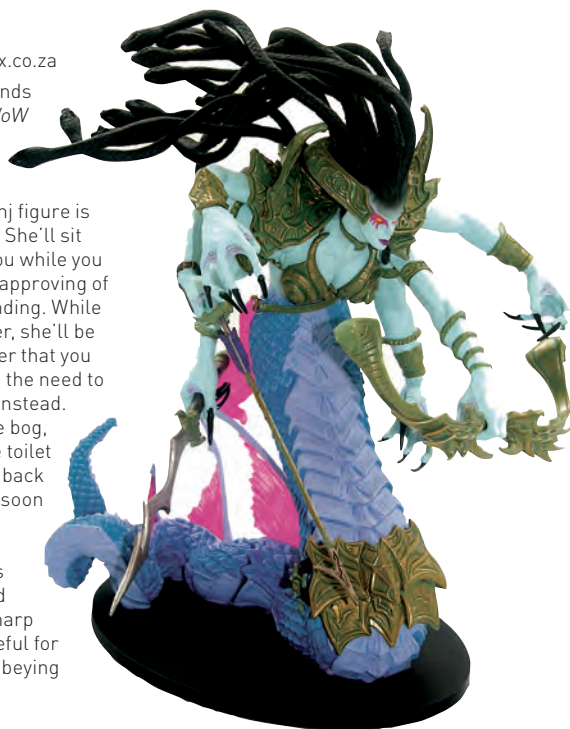


Lady Vashj Deluxe Boxset DC Unlimited: World of Warcraft Series 4

RRP: R485

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

If spending thousands of hours playing *WoW* isn't enough to prove your epic fanboy status, then this Lady Vashj figure is right up your alley. She'll sit quietly watching you while you play *WoW*, silently approving of your 79th-level grinding. While you're eating dinner, she'll be a constant reminder that you should be ignoring the need to eat and play *WoW* instead. When you're on the bog, she'll hand you the toilet roll so you can get back to playing *WoW* as soon as possible. She's able to handle all these tasks thanks to her six arms and her surprisingly sharp plastic sword - useful for coercing you into obeying her every order.



Cammy Pink Version Street Fighter Zero 3

RRP: R690

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Scale: 1/7

Look at those thighs! Look at all that... pink! It's crazy! This figurine of Cammy from the *Street Fighter* series depicts the popular fighter in her extremely pink costume variant. It'd be wise to not let all that pink fool you, though. She could still kick your ass, even though she's only ten inches tall.



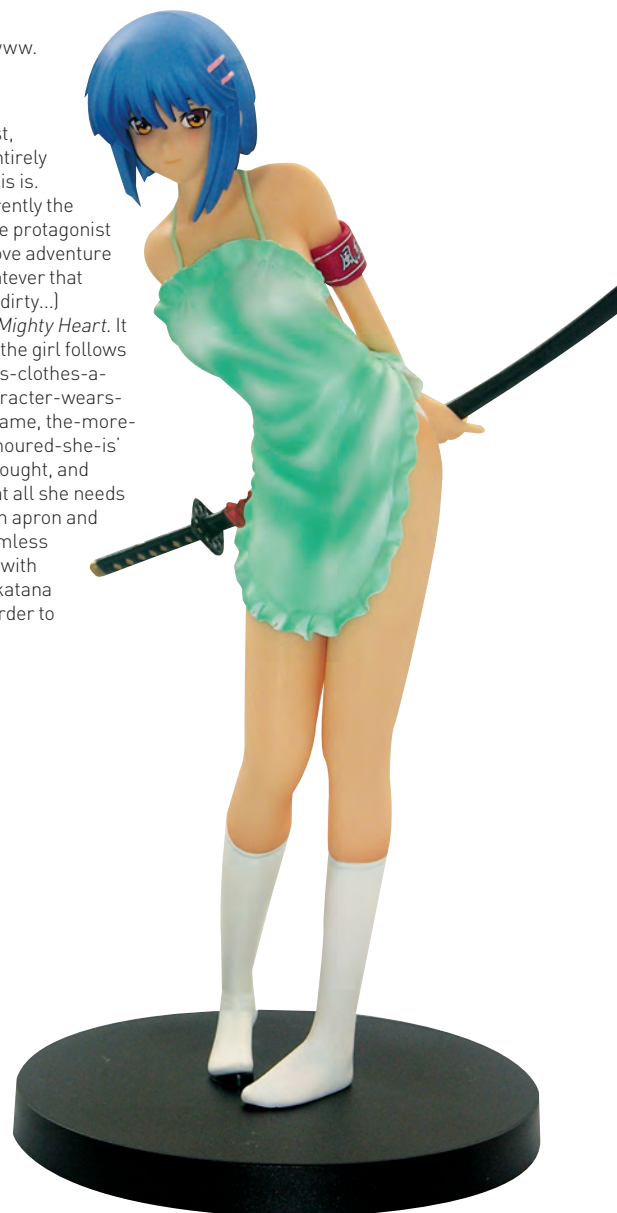
Otome Kurogane Tsuyokisu: Mighty Heart

RRP: R345

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Scale: 1/8

To be honest, we're not entirely sure who this is. She's apparently the cousin of the protagonist from the "love adventure game" (whatever that is - sounds dirty...). *Tsuyokisu: Mighty Heart*. It seems that the girl follows the 'the-less-clothes-a-female-character-wears-in-a-videogame, the-more-heavily-armoured-she-is' school of thought, and believes that all she needs to wear is an apron and look as harmless as possible with her deadly katana in hand in order to win the day.



The Desktop Heads of Easter Island

RRP: R110

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Much like the real Easter Island Heads, we're not sure where these came from and what they're doing at *NAG*. They just sort of showed up one day on top of a staff writer's PC, looking out into the distance. They brought with them a tiny book (to go with their tiny stature), which details the Heads and their mysterious history.





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OCZ updates their premium Vertex solid-state drive series

The Vertex Turbo Edition makes use of the fastest SDR DRAM cache available and a proprietary FTL-level firmware that provides an even faster solid-state drive for enthusiasts looking for the ultimate desktop or laptop storage upgrade, according to Ryan Edwards, Director of Product Management for the OCZ Technology Group. Read and write speeds clock in at up to 270MB/s read and 210MB/s write along with the lower power consumption and superior durability compared to conventional hard drives. It's available in capacities of 30GB (32), 60GB (64), 120GB (128), and 250GB (256).

MaxFire for the PC fighting gamer

The MaxFire G-08X2 gamepad has eight programmable action buttons on the top and front to give you the best control when playing fighting games on your PC. It also has an 8-way D-pad and plugs into your PC with via USB.



Dell expands Alienware brand

The Vertex Turbo Edition makes use of the fastest SDR DRAM cache available and a proprietary FTL-level firmware that provides an even faster solid-state drive for enthusiasts looking for the ultimate desktop or laptop storage upgrade, according to Ryan Edwards, Director of Product Management for the OCZ Technology Group. Read and write speeds clock in at up to 270MB/s read and 210MB/s write along with the lower power consumption and superior durability compared to conventional hard drives. It's available in capacities of 30GB (32), 60GB (64), 120GB (128), and 250GB (256).



Genius gaming keyboard

Ideally suited to FPS and STG online games, the new Genius keyboard features anti-ghost technology, allowing you to press six keys at the same time. It also has a keycap changer, is water-resistant and Windows 7 compatible.

Snippets

Genius has introduced a **force-feedback gaming wheel** that is compatible with both the PS2 and the PC. The TwinWheel FF makes use of Immersion-patented TouchSense technology, so you will be able to experience every bump, collision, and crash.

The **Skulltrail CPU, the QX9775**, will be phased out by Intel. Final orders for the processor will be taken on 9 October this year, and final shipments are scheduled for 11 June 2010.

The **MSI EX460**, aimed at casual gamers and multimedia junkies, fits in between a netbook and a notebook. It sports a 14-inch LED, Intel Core Duo and an ATI Mobility Radeon HD 4330 GPU (512MB).

The newly announced X-Fighter ATX mid-tower chassis has been **inspired by vessels from the heralded Star Wars series**. It even has a telescopic duct that extends outward and shifts side-to-side cooling drives and extra components up top.

NAG Awards

DREAM MACHINE: We have a dream. That only the best hardware gets this hot chick, waving her derriere in the air like she just don't care.

HARDWARE: Ever wonder why it's called hardware? If something has this award, then someone got hard for the ware.



Hardware Scoring System

Our hardware scoring system is based on the reviewer's expert opinion. The scale is from 1 to 5 with no fractional values. Each number has a specific meaning, described below. Most products will score 3 or 4, with the occasional 5 or 2, and almost never 1. Note that a high price alone can never lower a score below 3.

- 5 **The stuff of Legends.** Buy it while you can, we already have.
- 4 **A good deal;** worth it if you're shopping for one.
- 3 **What you'd expect,** no problems. You might want to wait for a sale.
- 2 **This has some issues.** You should shop around for something else.
- 1 **The stuff of Nightmares.** You'll be sorry you got one, even for free.

Hardware Q & A

FROM: Arno Stofberg

"I HAVE AN HP COMPAQ dc7600 3.4 GHz Pentium 4 HT. I have added 2 gigs of ddr2 667 ram and a 512mb 8500gt Fataality GPU. Now I know that this is only a p4 but it plays everything from Crysis to Far Cry 2 and we LAN with Supreme Commanders and my friends have core 2 duo and Quad core pc's and mine is the only one that does not freeze or bomb out. I want some advice... If I change my graphics card and ad 2 gigs of ram and get a new PSU; will my mother board and CPU keep me back? I want to get an Asus gforce gtx 275 gpu.

If my board is okay but my cpu is not good, wil a core 2 due like an Intel® Boxed Core2 Duo E7500 Processor - 3.00GHz Dual Core be fine and will it my board support it? I use Everest and it said my board supports up to 1033 fsb."

Neo: Whatever motherboard is in your PC will not support the Core 2 Duo or Quad, and if you had to add a GTX 275 into that machine, you would not be utilising all the power it has, and subsequently the money would be wasted. The best thing to do would be to invest in an aftermarket motherboard that supports Core 2 and is based on the P45 or even P35 chipset, buy the relevant CPU, and then, and only then, buy the graphics card and PSU. Any upgrade to the machine as it is currently will be short-lived.

FROM: Kyle Swanepoel

"I'M LOOKING FOR A bit of guidance. I've been saving up for a while now for a new AGP graphics card. And now I hear that they are impossible to find could you please assist me in my troublesome quest for a 512mb or more Pixel Shader version 4 graphics card. I have a Intel Celeron Pentium D motherboard with a ATI Radeon 9600 GT card now and its time to upgrade again."

Neo: There are just about no DirectX 10 AGP graphics cards available locally, or we have yet to find any. Importing may be your only option.

FROM: Danelle Vivier

"I SAW ON GUMTREE A Gainward 8800GTS for R1,200. Is it a risk to buy second hand products?"

Neo: There's a risk in buying anything second hand, so try to see if the seller still has the original invoice and if the product is still under warranty. That's about all you can do, really.

FROM: Stephen Fisher

"H.I. I WANT YOU to tell me where I can find a second hand gaming box on the internet. I have been by junkmail and gumtree and they don't have boxes. I'm looking for a web site that sales only second hand gaming boxes."

Neo: You will have better luck if you try any of these forums: www.prophecy.co.za, www.mybroadband.co.za or www.systemshock.co.za.

To have your hardware questions answered, write to lauren.dasneves@tidemedia.co.za, and we might print your question in the magazine.

#34nm

Intel is rumoured to be launching a new range of solid-state drives based on its 34nm NAND chips.

Eee PC Seashell

ASUS unveiled the Eee PC Seashell at Computex last month in Taiwan. It features a tiny, custom-designed PCB and is a compact and portable 10" ultra-mobile netbook. It weighs 1.1kg and is a mere 1" thick. Based on your system configuration you can opt for a 160GB HDD.



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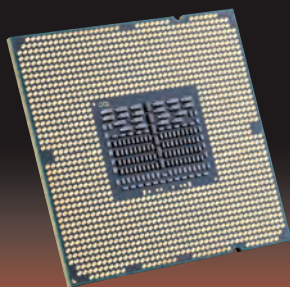


Dream Machine

THIS MONTH WE HAND out three new awards and also bring back an old award winner. Our Dream Machine is now sporting a new hard drive, CPU and cooler. Here are some of the highlights from the awards ceremony:

- The NAG Dream Machine CPU goes to the **Intel Core i7 Extreme 975**, the best CPU ever from Intel.
- The NAG Dream Machine Hard Drive goes to the **Patriot Torqx 128GB SSD**. It's without question the fastest MLC SSD money can buy.
- The NAG Dream Machine Cooler goes to the **Thermaltake BigWater 780**, the best water-cooling kit from Thermaltake we have ever reviewed.

Our fourth award this month was a re-crowning of a previous winner, the **GIGABYTE GA-EX58-EXTREME**. The EX58-EXTREME returns as our Dream Machine Motherboard because it had a BIOS update (F8b), which not only improves stability at high clock speeds, but also allows the motherboard to scale much better. In fact, we have yet to find a motherboard that comes close to matching the NB (Northbridge) speed - 4.9GHz - of this motherboard; and as such, it is deserving of this accolade once again.



Processor

Intel Core i7 Extreme 975
www.intel.com



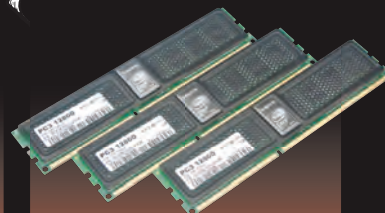
Motherboard

GIGABYTE GA-EX58-EXTREME
www.gigabyte.co.za



Graphics Card

ASUS GeForce ENGTX295
<http://za.asus.com>



Memory

OCZ Triple Channel PC12800 DDR3
www.ocztechnology.com



Case

Cooler Master Cosmos S
www.coolermaster.com



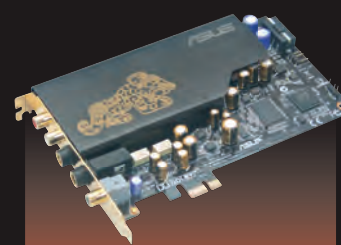
Storage

Patriot Torqx 128GB SSD
www.patriotmemory.com



Power Supply

IKONIK Vulcan 1,200W PSU
www.ikonik.com



Sound

ASUS Xonar Essence STX
<http://za.asus.com>



Monitor

Samsung SyncMaster T260 LCD
www.samsung.co.za



Keyboard

Microsoft SideWinder X6
www.microsoft.com



Mouse

Logitech G9 Laser
www.logitech.com



Cooling

Thermaltake BigWater 780
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AMD vs. Intel

YOU WILL HAVE TO forgive the subject of this month's Hardwired column. For as long as I have been involved in overclocking and computing in general, I have tried to avoid these debates, because they mostly highlight ignorance (or rather, short-term memory loss) more than they do anything else. However, I have decided to tackle this issue, or at least share my thoughts on it based on what I assume to be reason, proven numbers and also the history of these two semiconductor companies.

I will start off by saying that right now, there's no question that the Intel Core i7 CPU is the fastest x86 CPU on the market. I will repeat that again: the Intel Core i7 CPU is the fastest x86 CPU on the market. That doesn't necessarily mean it's the best-value-for-money CPU available. In fact, it's not. Those are two different debates, however, and I don't think there can be any disputing the fact that the AMD Phenom II CPUs offer the best bang for buck right now. Even then, this holds true only for the Phenom II line of CPUs, which offer quite reasonable performance at a very attractive price. The pricing may have been attractive with the original Phenom line-up, but the performance just wasn't there.

If one looks back to 2003, all the way to the middle of 2006, AMD had the superior architecture; and it's a fact that the Athlon 64 line of CPUs was better than the Pentium 4 CPUs of the time. Try as Intel might have, the Athlon 64 line had the higher IPC, the integrated memory controller, and the HyperTransport bus, which Intel just could not match with their NetBurst architecture. What many have forgotten, however, is that during this time, AMD's CPU prices were in line with what Intel is charging for their products today. The reason for this is simple: if you have the best CPU, then you can charge the most for it. Just in case some people had forgotten, the price of the Athlon 64 FX-57 was \$1,100 in 2005; which just so happens to be what the Core i7 Extreme 975 is going for today. The difference is that today, AMD can't justify charging that much, but Intel can: they have the fastest CPU available.

There's nothing inherently nice about AMD that makes the company charge less for their CPUs than Intel; and the same holds true for Intel for the most part. When Bulldozer/Fusion shows up, and if it really is what AMD says it will be, then we will see how pricing looks like at that time – especially considering that the platform is rumoured to have support for quad-channel memory.

What seems to be confusing many is the fact that Vince (KINGPIN) was able to break two 3DMark records with the Phenom II X4 955. However, what many do not know is that the CPU he used was not only handpicked, but it's one of less than a handful of CPUs that are capable of that speed. More recently, veteran and highly respected extreme overclockers Sampsa and Elmor managed to clock a Phenom II X4 to 7GHz, clocking in a 3DMark06 score of 38,139 and a 3DMark05 score of 50,017. These numbers are nothing but incredible, and full marks to both

overclockers. However, the results do not change the fact that the i7 is still a faster CPU.

The 3DMark numbers alone don't tell the entire story: the CPU was cooled using liquid helium, which is insanely expensive (you're looking at R240/l), and getting a CPU that will do 6.5GHz is not something anybody can do – you have to source one from AMD Fabs directly. Much like how the TWKR CPUs are handpicked, and there're less than a 100 of them available.

At this level of overclocking, the pricing of components doesn't come into play, so the value argument for the Phenom II is nullified. It would be cheaper to buy a Core i7 Extreme 975 and cool it with liquid nitrogen than it would be to purchase a Phenom II X4 955 BE and the liquid helium to go with it.

Having said that, the results recorded by Elmor and Sampsa are not new world records – those belong to Team Taiwan members, who have scores above the 38.6K mark in 3DMark06 and 50,030 in 3DMark05 with retail i7 CPUs. More than that, one only needs to look at the top 50 results in any benchmark, and you'd see that more than 99% of the submissions are with Core i7 and Core 2 Duo/Quad CPUs.

I appreciate the Phenom II X4 955 BE. In fact, I cannot wait to start putting it under some liquid nitrogen and shoot for 3DMark05 and 3DMark06 records (provided the CPU is up to it). However, I will be very careful in assuming I can better the 47,391 3DMark05 score I achieved using a Core i7 975 at 5.26GHz – which is higher than the numbers KINGPIN recorded with a Phenom II X4 955 BE when he held the world record not too long ago. (He has since returned to an Intel Xeon W3540 at 5.5GHz and has scored even better.)

Either way, it would be wrong of us as users to confuse the issue and say that the Phenom II is just as fast as the Core i7 because it is significantly better than the original Phenom. It is not. If we continue to say it is when it's not the case, when AMD eventually does release a CPU that is just as fast per clock – if not faster – what are we then to say? **NAG**

I will repeat that again: **the Intel Core i7 CPU is the fastest x86 CPU on the market.** That doesn't necessarily mean it's the best-value-for-money CPU available. In fact, it's not.

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guitar hero metallica

The game for people
who don't play games

30 free apps you
shouldn't be
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If we don't review it, you don't want it.



BY DERRICK CRAMER

Hard drives, a 'tough' subject

SO, YOU'VE SPENT MANY thousands on your new gaming rig: latest graphics card, CPU, a triple-channel kit of RAM or two, and a PSU capable of jump-starting a small tank. All in the quest for gaming goodness. If you're not as fortunate, you would be looking to upgrade one of these components. If you fall into either of these categories, you're probably a gamer, and use your PC solely as a portal to gaming goodness. If not, your PC is probably used as a more versatile device – a media centre, perhaps – and you know as well as any other that size doesn't matter anymore, nor does cost.

In an age where a 500GB hard drive costs a mere R550, most gamers have one or two of these. So, why then do most PCs at a LAN have many times more than this? What could possibly take up so much space that you would need to fill your machine with hard drives in excess of two terabytes? It can't be the games. In a 'common scenario', most gamers will have a couple of games (*Warcraft III* and *Call of Duty 4*, for example) to make the time at LANs pass by, while having three or four single-player games to 'occupy' their boredom at home. This barely fills 500GB – much less 2TB – so gaming is out of the equation, and the real culprit rears its head – media.

With the ease of downloading albums, many fans store their digital (and often illegal) favourites on their hard drives. I have seen collections of music above and beyond 160GB, which is a lot really; series folders that would 'laugh in the face' of a 500GB hard drive because of its punitive size; and lists of movies that take many days to back up in any form. We're talking terabytes here. And yet, somehow, all of this pales in comparison to any LANner's staple diet: anime. A 4TB collection is not an uncommon sight anymore, and many who own such things struggle to find the time to watch it all.

Allow me to introduce numbers into this to really show you how affordable hard drives are. The price per gigabyte of a 500GB hard drive is R1.09; that of a 1TB hard drive, R1.11; that of a 1.5TB monster of a drive, R1.04. Many LANners don't need 500GB, but since 160GB costs you R2.41 per gigabyte, you go for the logical option. Since most of my LAN group

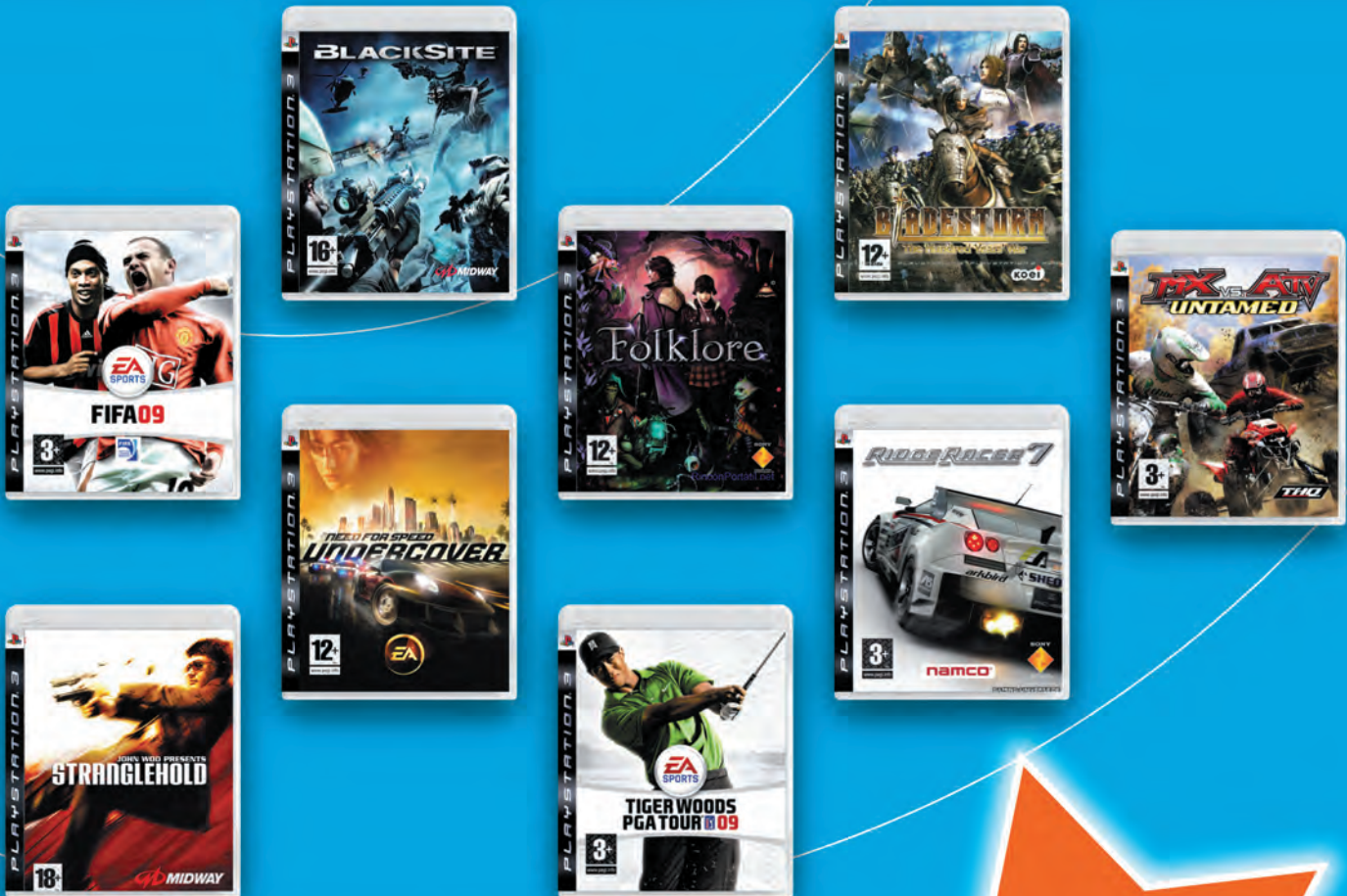
falls into this category, a recent small garage LAN saw us house over 11TB among us. With only ten people there, that's over 1TB per person. A scary statistic when you consider that the average was around 200GB five years ago.

I guess I've been rambling until now, but this is where it gets good – the reason you've read my column, my point. Hard drives are too cheap. Almost any LANner can afford a PC that will house all the games and media he or she could wish for – far more than he/she could legally afford at any rate. And therein lies the problem. Why get rid of a movie when you can keep it? Why delete a pirated game once you finish it? You store it, just in case you have a friend who doesn't have it yet. Why restrict yourself to a certain genre of music, when you can store and play at random many thousands of songs and experience what the world of audio can bring to you?

Hard drives are too cheap, and increase the ability of an individual to pirate practically anything nowadays. Having all this space tempts the individual to fill it, and more often than not, the only way he can is by pirating. The morally righteous, and often the wealthy, may be able to resist the urge of getting something for nothing, but it is safe to say that they make up a small minority of today's LANners. **NAG**

We're talking terabytes here. And yet, somehow, all of this pales in comparison to any LANner's staple diet: anime.

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Future tech and gaming

THERE ARE ESSENTIALLY THREE levels of tech in the world, barring, perhaps, what could sympathetically be described as 'low-tech'. That's any bugger with no electricity in their lives, at all.

But if you do have juice flowing to your home, you can be 'tech-aware', which is to say you have and can use a computer and cellphone, and are even capable of performing the necessary productivity tasks on them – but that's about it. There's 'tech-savvy', which equates to being able to strip and rebuild your machine on your own, and all the variations that that ability comes with. And then, there's 'tech-crazy': the weird and wonderful world of technology. The stuff that the mostly mad, 'electricity-haired' scientists across the world are constantly playing with, dreaming up, testing out, and just plain having a laugh with.

Although here at NAG we're mostly content playing in the upper echelon of the tech-savvy arena, this month we thought we'd take you readers with us for a delve into the dazzlingly deranged. After all, you never know when one of these hair-brained breakthroughs will become the next must-have gizmo, or even the basis of the next generation of human-PC interaction. Specifically, let's look at some of those things that have some basis in gaming.

GAMING + DRUGS

I live with a pair of 'under-fours', so the concept of any everyday version of the kiddie-friendly PediSedate should have me writing an immediate cheque for this disarmingly simple little headset contraption, which integrates the functions of an anaesthetist with the distraction of a Game Boy. That's right; if little Johnny is feeling somewhat troubled by his imminent surgery and could just kick and scream his way out of 'conventional' sedation, surgeons can now trick his ass into going calmly into la-la land, while merrily banging away at some Mega Man. Simple, sanitary, and serene. Great.

It seems that the same device has some pretty dangerous potential for abuse, however. And not just by tired parents. How about overstressed med

students wandering hospital halls, perhaps? Nitrous oxide, after all, doesn't knock you out in smaller doses, now does it? For that matter there are several other inhalable substances you could replace the laughing gas with, depending on taste. Maybe dump the Game Boy for something a bit more 'next-gen', possibly even a USB variant for the PC crowd, and you'd have one dangerously hot-ticket item on your hands.

What does make me laugh a bit about the PediSedate, though, is why not just get the hospital a PSP, and employ a shady-looking nurse to hover surreptitiously about with a paper mask doused with chloroform? Simply wait until the patient is completely absorbed in the mobile game, and just slip the innocuous-looking hospital mask over his head. And go ahead with planned procedure. Why build such a goofy-looking, brightly coloured headset arrangement for the purposes of mere distraction at all? It could just, well, be quite a bit more subtle, couldn't it?

A ROBOTIC REALITY

Everyone loves a good robot, don't they? From the tenderest ages, the concept of humanoid-aping machines, preferably operating independently of direct control, sporting heavy, angular armour and wielding some mighty weapons if possible, fascinates and enthrals us. But for the most part, the reality of robotics has largely failed to live up to this childish romanticism. The 'commercial' highlight being perhaps Honda's ASIMO, which can traverse tricky obstacles like stairs and actually run without just falling over, while the industrial reality is a production line of identical machinated tools, which perform pre-programmed tasks with minute precision in eternal repetition.

But with improving global communications bandwidth available and ever finer GPS tracking capabilities, the mechanics of robots are increasingly being employed in interesting ways. Remote control of a robot's movement, in minute detail and virtual real time, is becoming more and more popular for a variety of reasons. Although the first medical robot to successfully perform an

unmanned surgery recently went off smoothly, enabling a skilled surgeon to operate remotely via completely sterile, equally precise, and perfectly mimicking collections of metal and circuitry is a much more confidence inspiring thought if it's your brain being messed about with. Add to this mix all the recent nano-related activity taking place – batteries, display surfaces; who knows what will next be enhanced by the application of nanotech – and you've got the beginnings of numerous, particularly useful possibilities.

As with any technological development, though, there are both ups and downs here. Let's take probably the most basic, easily imaginable scenario: combat. Armies of very tough mechanoids, armed to the teeth, would rapidly cool down any hot zone, without risking so much as a single patriot's life, as they 'remote' in to the combat situation from afar. A nominal number of combatants could even 'field' an infinite number of war machines. And you get the advantages of an army made entirely of armour, without the compromise of relying on built-in and undoubtedly limited decision-making capacity.

However, the same remoteness from the action, which is a huge advantage in a major military operation, could be a serious concern if these methods are applied in other fields, of course. Let's consider the role of a passenger plane pilot. One of those rare birds who'd rather not see the globe in his work, thank you, and suddenly begins to operate globally from a static location. Sure, he's a professional with a strong sense of responsibility; but honestly, would you fly in a plane which the pilot himself wasn't actually on board of?

Without his own existence being equally at risk to the passengers, how can frequent flyers be certain that this tech-enabled freelancer is paying the control of their very lives as much serious attention as it deserves? What's to keep him or her from, say, just nodding off on a long-haul flight for instance? Or from failing to double-check a crucial calculation while lining up to land? Or even from 'toking' it up in the comfort of his own home, as smoking passengers battle with the 'smoke-free' regulations on board?

Alternately – and there is actually a development company working on this right now – a virtual race driver could line up alongside a grid of seasoned pros from the comfort of his own home. Same problem as the pilot, however. If this guy loses focus for a moment, as some observer accidentally passes between him and his screen, perhaps, or his mother charges in and disconnects the Internet mid-race, the resultant spectacular accident would almost certainly cost a few lives. I'm a big fan of working remotely, but for some careers, it's just not feasible.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF A GAMER

How about things that are more immediately relevant? Well, the weird [and weirdly popular] *Second Life* MMO has been doing some interesting things. A Japanese research house, for instance, has been experimenting with brainwaves to immerse patients who, in the physical world are completely paralysed, into the virtual world, where they're able to run, walk, jump, and basically live their lives entirely unfettered. The researchers maintain that the technology could be used to treat the deep depression some patients, who lose their mobility in adulthood and aren't able to transition to the psychology of paralysis, often go through.

That's fair, and a very noble objective. But haven't you guys ever seen the movie *Lawnmower Man*? Sure, the protagonist had all the use of his limbs, but was a disempowered, slightly slow and, as a result, rather abused young man in this case. But the appeal of his limitless existence in a virtual world drove him completely off the edge! From another perspective, there have already been real-world cases of MMO addicts forgetting to feed their children – even themselves – for days on end, with very serious (fatal, which I'd say qualifies as pretty serious) medical results. Unless this depression treatment remains closely monitored and controlled, surely patients will be at even bigger risk of similar, real-world apathy claiming their lives.

Then again, the concept would have fulfilled its original brief and eliminated their depression...

TOMORROW'S TECH

But, of course, all three of these examples are years away from commercial reality; although all three work today and have teams of intellectual giants at universities and research centres around the globe tweaking, refining, and generally cultivating them for eventual release to the general market, in some or other form. That's the point of technology, after all, and new developments can't ever be un-invented, as Nicholas Cage (or agent Stanley Goodspeed, in this case) famously wished of the atom bomb in the box-office hit, *The Rock*.

Likely to be more immediately 'on the ground', however, is the equalisation of ubiquitous mobile devices (cellphones, basically) and the world of high-end gaming. Apple's iPhone is a great market opportunity for mobile game developers, and, of course, has now spawned competitive (often superior) smartphones from every major manufacturer for inclusion in the rapidly growing mobile gaming market. There's more to come, however, with technologies like AMD's Tegra "Visual mobility" solutions steadily gaining momentum, in line with major technology companies driving towards this pretty non-specific visual-computing agenda. Even Cisco has decided that it would move networking in this direction, so you can be pretty sure that it will be a trend that sticks.

Coupled to other mobile gaming initiatives, like the location-aware game, for instance, these technologies are poised to drive the gaming market in completely new directions. Rather than 'just' boosting the graphics quality, physics content, or advanced AI subroutines, based on pure processing power available, they're likely to drive game developers to focus on more innovative, interactive apps for tomorrow, which in turn will kick off research projects on even newer inventions from the tech-crazy academia, destined to become reality in their own times.

That's the wonderful thing about technology. Everything imaginable can be made reality eventually, and in some or other form.

For enjoying your current game titles, however, we suggest that you not fret too much about all of this game-changing tech on the horizon, and just ensure that you've got enough RAM, adequate CPU clock speeds, and some blistering rendering hardware in place, and enjoy the ride. When the tech does evolve, you'd either be swept along with it, or you'd refuse to adapt and become a last-gen gamer. **NAG**

– Russell Bennett

The Folly of Generic Power Supplies

THE POWER SUPPLY UNIT (PSU) is often the most-overlooked part of the entire PC-building or -purchasing process. Many people assume that if the PC powers on, then the PSU is good enough, and the power supply is sufficient. This is obviously not the case, and if anything, it is very dangerous. A poorly-designed power supply is not only a fire hazard, but it can damage itself, and - more importantly - your hardware. Therefore, it is important to spend time matching the PSU with your system. There's no need to spend copious amounts of money on a PSU, unless you're an extreme overclocker or run a server of some sort with many devices powered by it. For most people, and even high-end gamers, anything from 600 watts and higher will do.

Having said that, buying any generic 600-watt unit will not do. In fact, buying a generic version of a power supply with any rating is not recommended. We cannot stress enough how important it is to steer clear of the generic units that are available at so many retail stores. While these may work for older machines and basic computers, most people who are reading this have anything but basic computers. Therefore, it's of paramount importance that these power supplies (and others of their ilk) are avoided at all costs. The pricing may seem attractive, but purchasing any of these is a sure way to turn equipment worth thousands into a pile of silicon rubbish.

To eliminate the risk and save you the trouble, we went out and bought four generic PSUs from different retail stores. We put them to the test, based on their specifications, and tried to see how many of them lived up to the numbers that are claimed. Please note that the total power provided by each unit is irrelevant, because that is not what we were testing. And even if we were, the power load on each PSU was never more than 400W.

Testing methods

We made use of the DBS-2200, which is a PSU load-testing unit and is the only one in the country. This unit allows us to load individual rails on the PSU, and can load any PSU with a maximum of 800W total power draw. More than that, this unit allows the isolation and testing of the CPU 12V line and PCI Express rails, including eight- and six-pin types. Power draw was measured using a plug-in power monitor, which not only monitors how much power each system is drawing from the wall socket, but can also tell you the total amount of power used over an hour (kilowatt hour - kWh) and how much current the system is drawing. When testing these units, the most striking thing was that some of the specifications were so far off from what the PSU could deliver, that it's almost comical reading the rating on each of the individual rails. One unit had a 5V line rated at a ridiculous 54A! The same PSU, however, had a 12V line rated at 32A (two 16A lines) in total.



REFERENCE PSU
Cooler Master Extreme Power 550 Watt

Rating: 550W
Specifications: 32A (+12V); 25A (+3.3V); 25A (+5V)
Estimated Street Price: R650
Test Result: Passed!



REFERENCE HIGH-END PSU
IKONIK vulcan 1200W

Rating: 1.2kW
Specifications: 120A (+12V); 30A (+3.3V); 30A (+5V)
Estimated Street Price: R4,300
Test Result: Passed!





GENERIC PSU #1 ZIXA 500

Rating: 500W

Specifications: 16A (+12V); 25A (+3.3V); 40A (+5V)

Estimated Street Price: R399

Test Result: Failed! The ZIXA unit failed miserably, surviving less than 60 seconds while attempting to load the unit. The PSU blew and would have destroyed the motherboard at the least.



GENERIC PSU #3 LGP6-43

Rating: 550W

Specifications: 36A (+12V); 36A (+3.3V); 54A (+5V)

Estimated Street Price: R599

Test Result: Failed! While this was the only one of the generic PSUs to survive, it was only a matter of time before it bombed. It did, however, fair better than the others.



GENERIC PSU #2 EZ-Cool 450

Rating: 450W

Specifications: 25A (+12V); 32A (+3.3V); 40A (+5V)

Estimated Street Price: R399

Test Result: Failed! The EZ-Cool didn't even survive 16A on the two 12V lines. It was irreversibly damaged.



GENERIC PSU #4 LGP9-25

Rating: 450W

Specifications: 27A (+12V); 26A (+3.3V); 45A (+5V)

Estimated Street Price: R399

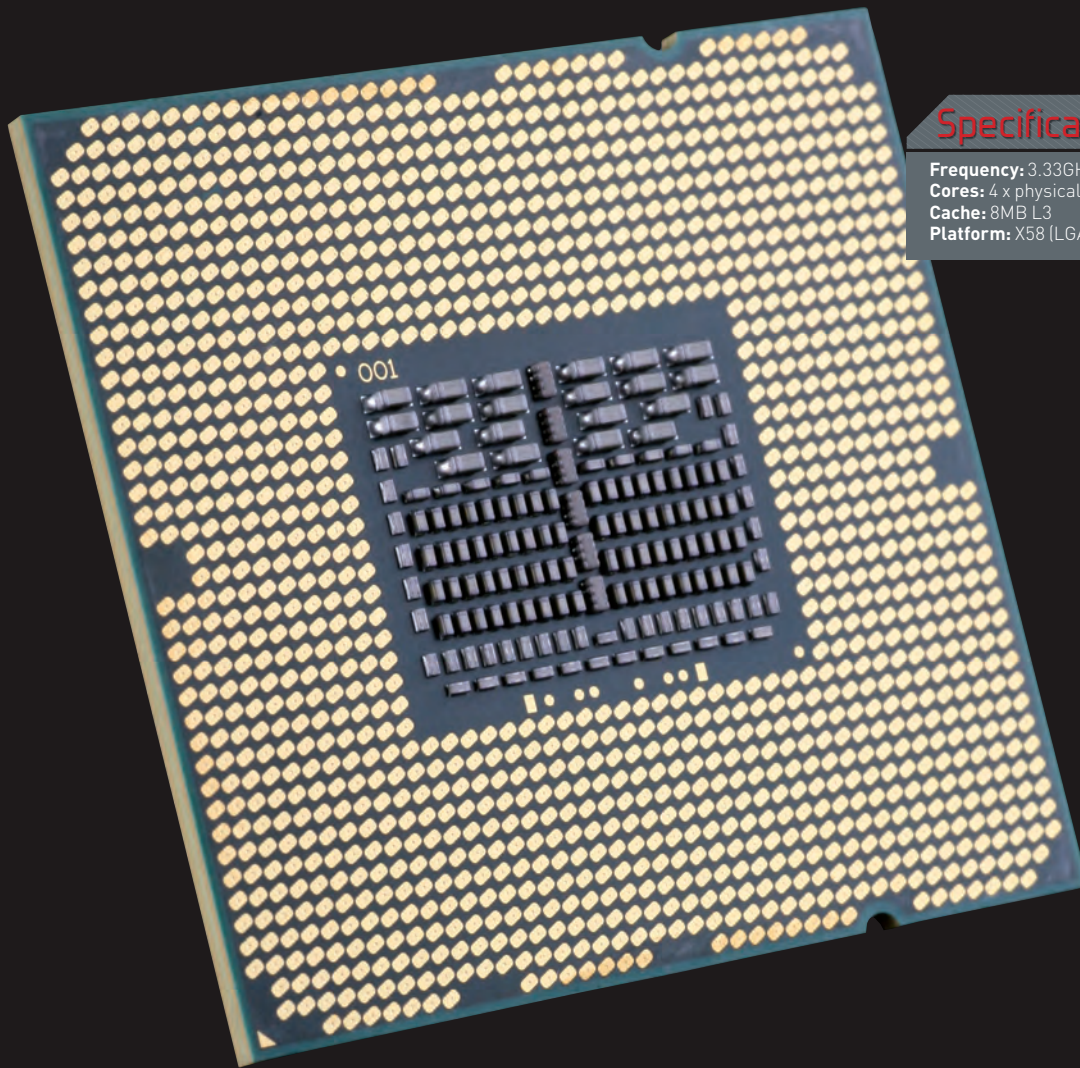
Test Result: Failed! This PSU blew within seconds of applying full load. Without a doubt the worst PSU in this test group.

Conclusion

If all the units bombing in this test aren't enough to convince you to stay as far away as possible from generic power supplies, then take note of the following - never buy a PSU without a certification (UL) number. (It's the alphanumeric number printed on the PSU and begins with "E" - e.g. "E243838".)

In addition to this certification, look for the TÜV approval sign on the box and PSU itself. These two certifications alone eliminate many of the questionable PSUs you'll find locally; and just looking out for these, will help you with your purchasing decision.

Neo Sibeko



Specifications

Frequency: 3.33GHz
Cores: 4 x physical (8 x logical)
Cache: 8MB L3
Platform: X58 (LGA 1366)

Intel Core i7 Extreme 975

THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT the Intel Core i7 965 was – and remains – an incredible CPU; and, even in this day of the Core i7 975, it still manages to deliver fantastic numbers. However, truly great 965 CPUs are rare. Most of the CPUs clock to 5GHz, but that is with only four threads enabled (HT off).

Handpicked samples have been able to reach frequencies as high as 5.6GHz, but there are less than four CPUs capable of that. This is where the D0-stepping 975 CPU differs. It still holds true that a 5.5GHz-capable 975 is rare, but the chances of ending up with one at a store are much higher than they were with the 965.

Intel was kind enough to let us use their Core i7 Extreme 975 for an extended period. During that time, the CPU managed to 'crush' all others CPUs we had in the past. Not only did it extend the lead over the competition (which the 965 set), but it's almost as if it's an engineering exercise for Intel.

Whatever it might be, it's great for

gamers and particularly enthusiasts. The 975 we had was able to reach a frequency of 5,104MHz, using liquid nitrogen to cool it, with all eight threads enabled; and 5,267MHz with HT disabled. This might not seem as impressive as the incredible clock speeds achieved by the Core 2 line of CPUs. However, it is worth noting that for the previous Core 2 line of CPUs to match the performance of the i7, they need to be clocked to at least 1GHz or higher. And sometimes that isn't even enough. A classic example of this is with the Super PI 1.5XS 32M benchmark: it's so much faster on the Core i7 that many Core 2 users have stopped submitting results for the benchmark. In this particular test, a Core 2 Duo E8XXX-series CPU, even at 6.5GHz, was no match for the Core i7 975 at 4.9GHz.

Keep in mind, as well, that Super PI 1.5XS is not multi-threaded, so the performance advantage of the i7 has nothing to do with the number of in-flight threads – its raw CPU-cycle efficiency. Having said that, what might come as a surprise to many is that the 975 is actually

a little faster than the 965 at the exact same frequency. Obviously, there have been some minor changes in the CPU core, which are not significant enough to warrant a name change for the CPU architecture, but obvious enough to pick up at very high speeds. Most users will never appreciate the difference between the two revisions, but in synthetic benchmarks – where every 0.1fps counts – it's a big enough difference to make people want to switch over immediately.

With the 975, everything remains the same as it was with the 965 in terms of specifications, except maybe for the higher default multiplier of 25x, resulting in a 3.33GHz clock speed. The resulting frequency improves performance as much as one would expect, but we were interested in more than that. We wanted to push the 975 to its limits, because this is where the 975 would prove itself.

To this end, it performed beautifully. It not only managed to break three local records, but it also managed two top-20 worldwide scores, and set a



Specifications

Chipset: AMD R790FX + SB750
Memory: DDR3 800/1,066/1,333/1,600 (OC)
CPU Support: AMD AM3 (939)

ASUS Crosshair III Formula

ASUS HAS BEEN PRODUCING class-leading, and more importantly, platform-leading motherboards for some time now. With every ROG (Republic Of Gamers) product, we can see ASUS pushing the boundaries to various degrees.

Therefore, we were looking forward to the Crosshair board, especially after the performance and features that the Crosshair II came with. In many ways, this version is better; and in some ways, it's a little less than what we expected.

This is not because there's anything missing on the Crosshair III as such, but compared to its Intel-equivalent board, there are some discrepancies that are not really related to the chipset. The most important feature that's missing is the ability to run 3-Way CrossFire. The Crosshair III only has two full-speed PCI Express 2.0 16x slots. While very few people make use of 3-Way CrossFire, it is well known by now that 3-Way CrossFire is faster than 4-Way CrossFire in the majority of games; and if you are not interested in the 4870X2 cards, you are limited to 2-Way 4890 CrossFire.

As for the board itself, the layout is great. It's a ROG board, after all. But compared to the M4A79T Deluxe – which we assumed the Crosshair III would be based on – it does look a little 'empty'. The M4A79T Deluxe supports 3-Way CrossFire, and even has four full-length PCI Express slots.

Don't be deterred, though: the Crosshair III Formula is not only a capable motherboard, but it is one of the best AM3 motherboards you can buy right now. We

are not sure if there will be an Extreme version with all the features not present here, but if it is eventually released, it will have a hard time bettering the Crosshair III.

One of the most interesting features of this motherboard is the ability to test if the installed memory is compatible and will actually work. And that's without powering the system at all. ASUS calls this the "MemOK!" feature, and it is labelled as such on the motherboard. How this feature works is not really clear, but basically, the board is able to detect which are the right settings for your memory that will enable system POST. So, if you have a high-performance set that requires the timings to be CL8-8-8-21 1T and not what is necessarily programmed on the SPD, the MemOK! feature will configure the memory to the right timings, so you can at least get into the BIOS and set the right settings for the memory.

In addition to the MemOK! feature, the Crosshair III Formula has native support for the OC Station (reviewed next month), which allows you to tweak the motherboard settings on the fly – from memory multipliers, HT/NB frequency, voltage settings, and just about anything you may want to change while overclocking.

When it comes to overclocking, the Crosshair board is much like the M4A79T Deluxe; and that's great, considering that the Deluxe board was on several occasions a 3DMark world record-holder. We managed an HT speed of 267MHz, but there are people who have managed

to clock above 300MHz using this motherboard. This should be great for those who don't use Black Edition CPUs and rely on the HT speed to increase their CPU frequency.

Overall, the Crosshair III is a great motherboard. The use of an X-Fi EAX HD 4.0-capable audio riser card means that this motherboard is not only ideal for enthusiasts, but also for gamers and home entertainment. We would have appreciated a second Gigabit Ethernet port, or even better, more SATA 2 headers. However, most will never need two Gigabit Ethernet ports anyway.

Comparisons between this motherboard and the M4A79T Deluxe cannot be avoided, but we have to say that if we were building a gaming rig that looked the part and were not particularly interested in 3-Way CrossFire, then this would certainly be the board to buy. ASUS has produced another excellent product with the Crosshair III Formula.

NAG
Neo Sibeko



Bottom Line

The Crosshair III Formula is exactly what you would expect from an ROG motherboard. Fantastic!

Plus

- + Detailed BIOS
- + Overclocks well
- + MemOK!

Minus

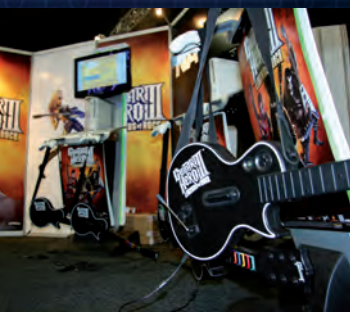
- Only two PCI Express 16x slots

rage expo

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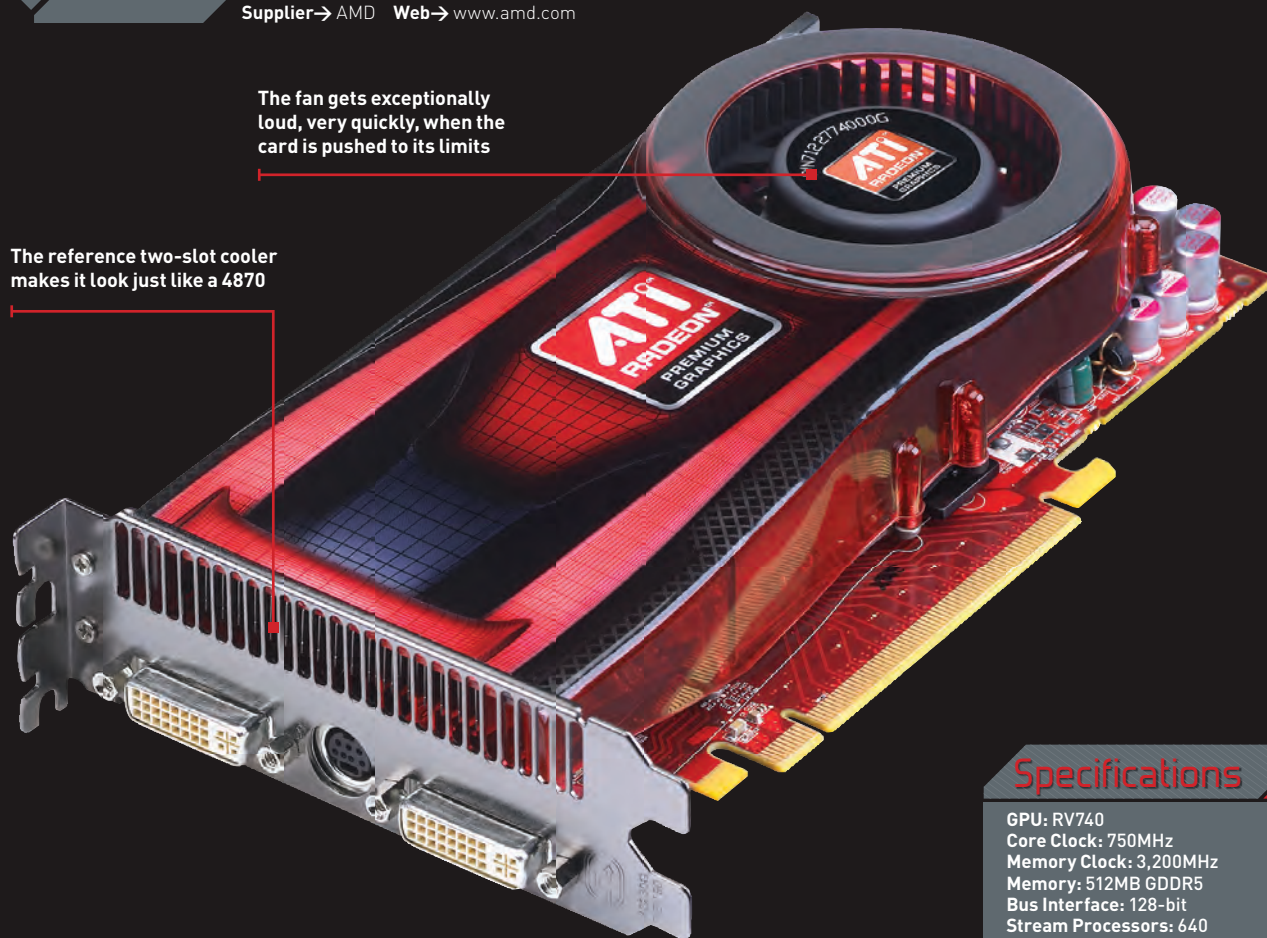
2 - 4 October 2009

The Coco-Cola Dome, Johannesburg

www.rageexpo.co.za

The fan gets exceptionally loud, very quickly, when the card is pushed to its limits

The reference two-slot cooler makes it look just like a 4870



Specifications

GPU: RV740
Core Clock: 750MHz
Memory Clock: 3,200MHz
Memory: 512MB GDDR5
Bus Interface: 128-bit
Stream Processors: 640

ATI Radeon HD 4770

ATI AND PARENT COMPANY AMD sure do love to steal a march on their competition wherever they can in pure engineering terms, although these technological advancements don't always mean massive performance benefits. The latest 'victory' the company had to 'crow' about was the release of the first GPU built using a 40nm manufacturing process, the budget-targeted Radeon HD 4770.

Basically, the die-size shrinkage has enabled ATI to offer this latest card with a new core GPU based on the RV770 of more mainstream-orientated Radeon HD family members, at a pretty mouth-watering price. Well below R2K, in fact: you'll look at about R1,800 for a 4770 from any of the well-known manufacturers.

Let's quickly go over some performance results for a more direct comparison. The HD 4770, in fact, bests the slightly more expensive GTS250 from NVIDIA in 3DMark Vantage, with a GPU score of 6,680. That suggests you'll be saving around R400 to R500 for the same performance as the NVIDIA part. Although you are losing PhysX capability, that's a healthy cash saving in these tight times.

However, in real-world tests, such as *Crysis*, the Radeon does stumble slightly, and can only manage a playable

frame rate at 1,280 x 1,024 with all detail settings on high and no AA. Configured thus, it averages 42.66fps. However, click those advanced drop-downs, change the detail settings to very high, and you'll be limping along at 21.4fps, while the lightly-overclocked TwinTech GTS250 [also reviewed in this issue] is still rocking at 29fps. Still, you pay your money...

These results are despite an identical 750MHz core clock speed. The Radeon's 512MB of memory is of the substantially faster and more expensive GDDR5 variety, and clocked at 3,200MHz [a full 1,000MHz up on a stock GTS250]. It is unfortunately limited to a 128-bit memory bus, which cancels out this clock-speed advantage.

This review isn't finished, though. Usually, a reduced die size also means enabling a higher clock frequency for the same cooling requirement, which is why this 4770 is totally 'happy' at 750MHz on the core. More importantly, you can quite easily 'coax' some spectacular numbers. Our test sample was still rock solid at 850MHz on the core and 3,800MHz on the RAM, although we did have to 'up' the fan speed a bit. Unfortunately, this cooler gets quite loud when the fan speed is set at 65% or more.

Still, the performance improvements were worth it. It still didn't quite match

the GTS250's *Crysis* results at very high, but outperformed it with quality set to high, posting an average of 47.26fps; and widened its Vantage advantage significantly with a final result just a few clicks under 7,000. That's a big performance jump for free, and a stellar result for a sub-R2K card!

It really is a pity that we're back to big noise generation with this OC. Sure, we could tone it down slightly and perhaps find a balance between performance and noise, but this cooler should be much quieter to better capitalise on all that headroom. Hopefully ATI's manufacturing partners can help here: we'd love to see a Sapphire TOXIC version of this cheapie.

NAG
Russell Bennett



Bottom Line

The 40nm manufacturing process sort of had me expecting something more high-tech. It does overclock nicely, though.

Plus

- + Very affordable
- + Significant OC headroom

Minus

- 128-bit bus width
- Hammered by *Crysis*

Supplier → TCM Warehouse Web → www.dreamgear.net

The Warbeast works with all *Guitar Hero* titles, *Rock Band* and even *Rock Revolution*



Warbeast Guitar

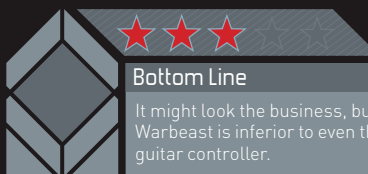
SOMETIMES, WHILE YOU'RE PLAYING *Guitar Hero*, it's not enough to simply feel like a badass – you need to look like one too. The industrious folks over at dreamGEAR have a solution to this problem, thankfully, in the form of this full-size controller built in partnership with legendary guitar manufacturers, B.C. Rich. Based on the original Warbeast, but made purely of plastic, this controller is extremely durable and has a great heft to it; and is guaranteed to help you perfect your living-room rock-star poses.

Sadly, the Warbeast looks much better than it performs. Those used to the smaller *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band* controllers will immediately notice the wider and comparatively noisy fret buttons, and the head stock has a slightly protruding bit that can make use of the green button fairly uncomfortable (depending on how you hold the controller). Farther down the neck are five other fret buttons, which allow the controller to be played without

strumming at all. These are a poor excuse for the lack of slider bar. The Warbeast also succumbs to the *GHIII* controllers' misfortune of not connecting directly to the PS3, and requires the use of the included USB wireless receiver. Additionally, the controller's power is supplied by four AA batteries. With a price like this, I don't think it's unfair to expect a built-in rechargeable battery.

While the Warbeast certainly looks fantastic, and should appeal to (real) guitar nuts, there's honestly little reason to buy it over the standard *GH World Tour* guitar, which is only half the price and has more features. It is, however, worth mentioning that current *GH* world record-holder Danny Johnson was seen at this year's E3 demonstrating the Warbeast. That's not to say that it's his new favourite toy, but personal preferences and dedication will evidently have a lot to do with the joy one derives from this controller. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows



Bottom Line

It might look the business, but the Warbeast is inferior to even the *GHIII* guitar controller.

Plus

- + Looks great
- + Officially licensed
- + Multi-game compatible

Minus

- Uncomfortable
- Noisy buttons
- PS2/PS3 only



TA 790GX

- » AMD AM2+/AM2 Platform
- » Support latest AMD Phenom X4, X3 / Athlon / Sempron processors
- » AMD 140W processor support
- » AMD 790GX Chipset with ATI Radeon HD 3300 Graphics
- » On Board 64MB DDR2 Side-Port memory
- » Dual-Channel DDR2 1066/800/667/533
- » ATI Hybrid Graphics Support
- » Superior scaling with ATI CrossFireX technology
- » Integrated HDMI/DVI interface with HDCP Support 1080P HD Video Experience
- » AMD OverDrive Utility Support



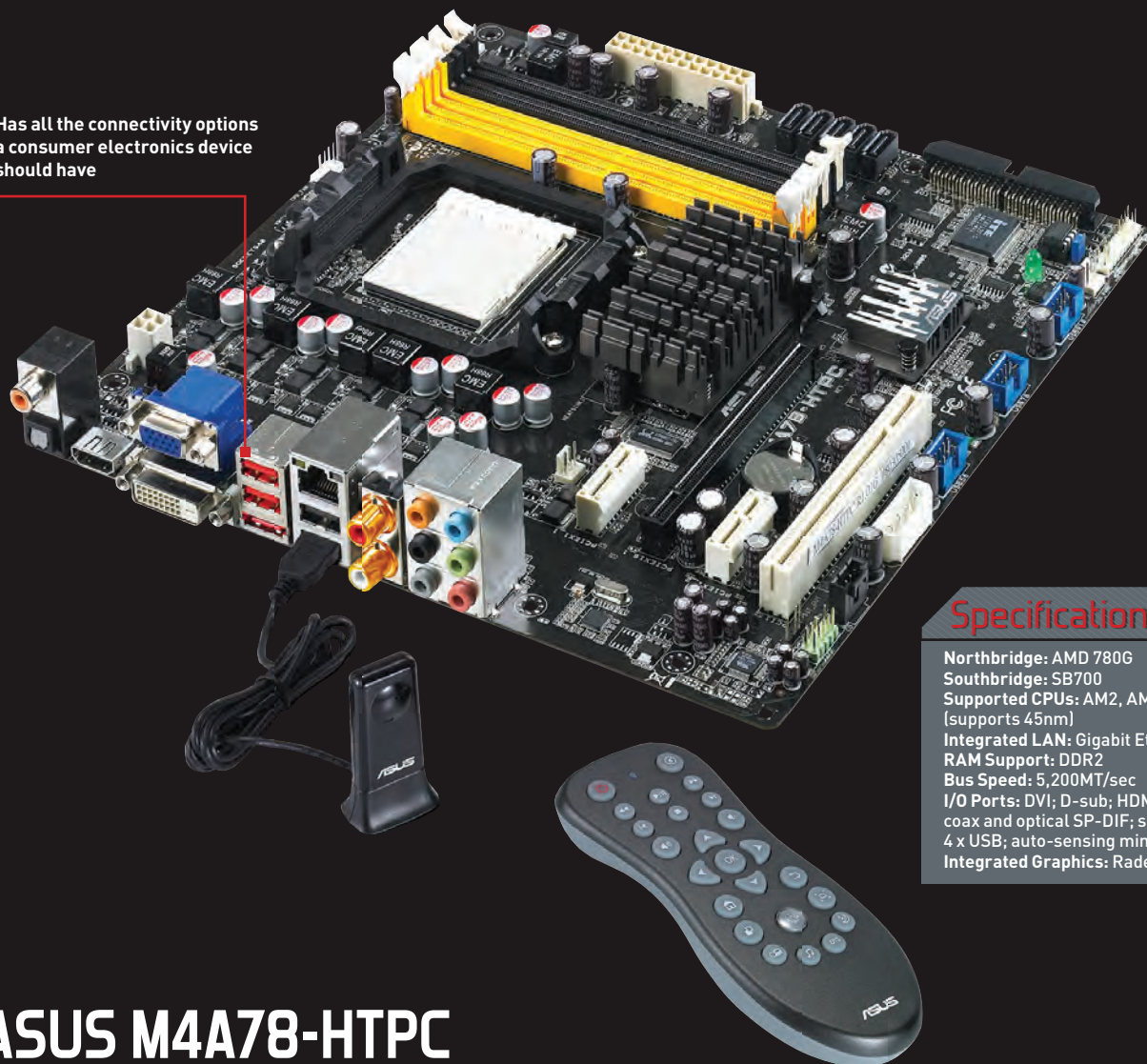
- » Design for Intel socket 1366 Nehalem Core i7 Extreme/ Core i7 45nm processors
- » Intel X58 / ICH10R Chipset
- » 12 Phases Power Design
- » Support 6-DIMM DDR3-1866(OC)/1600(OC)/1333(OC) up to 24G max
- » Support ATI CrossfireX and nVidia SLI Technology
- » 100% X.D.C Japanese solid capacitor
- » BIostar Space-Pipe with high efficiency copper heat-pipe
- » BIostar G.P.U (Green Power Utility) Technology for Energy Saving
- » BIostar TPower Utility
- » On board Dual GbE
- » 1394a, eSATA, S/PDIF Out (Optical/Coaxial)



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Tel: +27 82 705 5905, Fax: +27 86 679 3679

Has all the connectivity options a consumer electronics device should have



Specifications

Northbridge: AMD 780G
 Southbridge: SB700
 Supported CPUs: AM2, AM2+, AM3 (supports 45nm)
 Integrated LAN: Gigabit Ethernet
 RAM Support: DDR2
 Bus Speed: 5,200MT/sec
 I/O Ports: DVI; D-sub; HDMI; eSATA; coax and optical SP-DIF; stereo RCA; 4 x USB; auto-sensing mini-jacks
 Integrated Graphics: Radeon HD 3200

ASUS M4A78-HTPC

OUTRIGHT POWER, WHILE GREAT for gaming or productivity in high-end graphical environments, is all but meaningless in an HTPC. Therefore, the fact that this ASUS M4A78-HTPC is running NAG's own Phenom X2 Black means exactly squat.

But there are other considerations that are important. Primary among these is adequate built-in connectivity to push high-definition video and audio to a killer LCD TV and a high-end sound system. And this latest product from ASUS 'offers up' in spades, with the added benefit of an included infrared remote (with USB sensor) for controlling what you want to stream.

In fact, this ASUS board 'claims' to offer levels of audio fidelity at least a couple of notches above competitive systems, thanks to gold-plated connectors on the I/O plate and an additional Molex power connector on the board; which, it's claimed, reduces electrical noise filtering through to your big-money speaker stack.

Unfortunately, true audiophiles will

tell you that gold-plated connections mean only one thing: they won't oxidise (rust). If the signal being generated is of high enough quality, 'traditional' (and cheaper) connections will transmit the signal as 'faithfully' to your reproduction equipment.

In this regard, that Molex connection actually does help marginally. With it connected, there was definitely less hissing and popping coming through my system at high volume, compared to ignoring it altogether.

So then, the interface. Although the ASUS remote will work with Windows Media Center, it's really designed for use with ASUS's own Home Theatre Gate HTPC environment, which offers very similar functionality, but is somewhat more limited than the Microsoft solution. Still, it's good enough, really, and makes this AMD 780-based HTPC board a pretty good buy. It's a pity, however, that it's priced at a premium because of irrelevances - like the gold used in its construction - and that it isn't a small form-factor

board, but a microATX one.

Nevertheless, it runs very quiet, even with our 'enthusiast-orientated' CPU installed. It does this primarily by managing the fans more aggressively than a conventional board would, favouring silent operation over outright cooling ability, which worked very well in the wintry temperatures of our test period. We'd love to try it again in the heat of summer, though, just to compare. **NAG**

Russell Bennett



Bottom Line

Sound, but not especially sparkling. It's all you need in an HTPC, with integrated HDMI, good quality audio, and even a neat remote.

Plus

- + Supports AM3 CPUs
- + ASUS Home Theatre Gate pretty slick

Minus

- Pricey
- Under delivers on the 'hype-tastic' claims

Tagan A+ Cupid 3 Mini-ITX HTPC Chassis

MANY OF YOU MIGHT be familiar with Tagan – or, at least, might have heard the name before. The company has its design quarters in Germany, but is mainly a Taiwanese company that manufactures PSUs, cases, and other computer parts.

With the Atom CPU, there seems to be a growing need for the platform to get into more spaces, and not just be limited to the netbook market. This is where a Mini-ITX motherboard based on the NVIDIA ION or Intel's native chipset-and-CPU combo would fit right in.

There are many Micro-ATX cases around, but these are still a little too 'big' for some. Nevertheless, with the Mini-ITX standard, one could install a fully functioning PC into a relatively small chassis, use it as a media server, media centre PC, or a home theatre PC. The Cupid 3 is perfect for such setups.

The case is relatively light: just under two and a half kilograms, and that is with the 200-watt power supply included. This PSU is capable of powering all the components you'd install in the Cupid case. The case is obviously not designed for discreet graphics cards, but it does feature an expansion slot for a single PCI card (a discreet audio-

Specifications

Motherboard Support: All Mini-ITX motherboards
PSU: 200W (3 x SATA; 2 x 4-pin Molex)
Drive Bays: 3 (1 x 5.25-inch; 2 x 3.5-inch)

controller card, for example).

Aesthetically, the case will not impress everyone, and some might find it a little bland. But we believe that the black, silver and grey colour scheme allows it to fit into just about any environment. In fact, it would not look out of place next to a mid- to high-end home theatre setup in one's lounge.

The front of the unit is clean, and you need to press against it to reveal the CF/SD/MD card slot, the USB port, and front audio inputs just under the DVD drive bay. The bay has a cover that will help your optical drive blend in with the fascia: it hides the optical drive, leaving the front clean and uniform in colour. If you need a Mini-ITX case, the Tagan A+ Cupid 3 Mini-ITX HTPC Chassis is worth looking at. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



Bottom Line

Lightweight Mini-ITX case for those concerned more about functionality than looks.

Plus

+ Spacious for a Mini-ITX case
 + Sturdy

Minus

- Colour scheme may not be for everyone

Supplier → Corex Web → www.corex.co.za

Thermaltake BigWater 780

IF YOU SAID THAT there must be as many water-cooling kits as there are air coolers these days, you'd not be far off. Water-cooling has 'grown' over the years, from a niche product to a common cooling method. No longer reserved for enthusiasts, these days there are easy-to-assemble kits, which take about as much effort to install as a regular heat-sink fan. Water-cooling is now accessible to virtually anybody with a desktop PC.

The BigWater 780 is not an entry-level cooling system; it is a more specialised unit. It's still very easy to put together, but it's more for the person who wants significant gains by moving to water-cooling, instead of just a quieter or marginally cooler-running system. The BigWater 780 may not 'match' the likes of the Swiftech Apex series, as it doesn't feature an industrial-grade pump and other parts. However, it does perform much better than Thermaltake's older units, which were less than satisfactory.

With the BigWater 780, however, Thermaltake is taking the challenge to the likes of Koolance and DangerDen's lower-end systems. We tested the BigWater using a Core i7 Extreme 965 CPU; and while it did not allow us to achieve a higher overclock, it allowed us to stabilise our highest frequency. More importantly, it

Specifications

CPU Support: Intel LGA 775/LGA 1366; AMD AM2/AM2+/AM3
Pump: 500l/hr
Radiator Dimensions: 153mm x 120mm x 28mm
Fan Noise: 10-20dB

enabled us to use the same frequency with Hyper-Threading turned on.

This was a pleasant surprise, as Hyper-Threading tends to limit the overclocking headroom of CPUs, because of the heat generated and the extra load the four logical threads put on the CPU. In terms of the CPU-overclocking ceiling, i7 CPUs unfortunately don't have a large delta between air-, water- and extreme-cooling frequencies. This could be as little as 400MHz. But with the BigWater 780, we were able to get the most out of the CPU, and with relative ease, the unit can be set up in less than 30 minutes.

Temperatures will vary depending on the environment, but this is definitely the best water-cooling kit from Thermaltake we have ever reviewed, and it deserves a 'spot' in our Dream Machine this month. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



Bottom Line

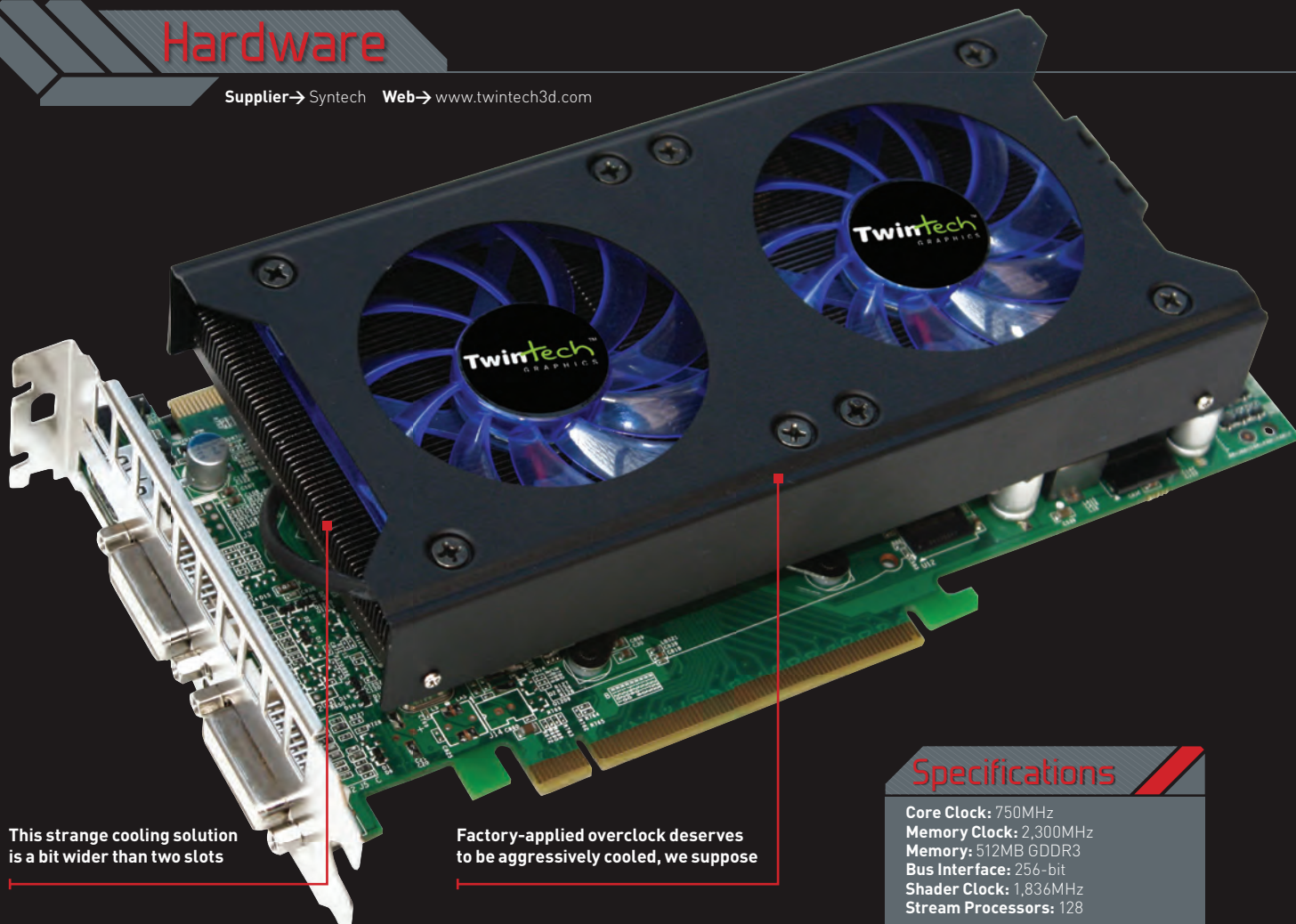
An easy-to-assemble, yet powerful water-cooling kit – definitely the best from Thermaltake, yet.

Plus

+ Quiet
 + Easy to set up
 + Cooling ability

Minus

- Could use a larger radiator



This strange cooling solution is a bit wider than two slots

Factory-applied overclock deserves to be aggressively cooled, we suppose

Specifications

Core Clock: 750MHz
Memory Clock: 2,300MHz
Memory: 512MB GDDR3
Bus Interface: 256-bit
Shader Clock: 1,836MHz
Stream Processors: 128

TwinTech GeForce GTS250 XT OC Edition

THE GLOBAL RECESSION, EVEN in our usually buoyant niche, is really starting to bite these days. But the upshot of this shrinkage in spending power seems to be a newly reinvigorated focus on the more value-orientated offerings available. Just look at the rise of netbooks as evidence. Mobility isn't the key driver in this space anymore; it's the affordability of these machines that really appeal at the moment.

The graphics card manufacturers have seen this trend and have responded, swelling their mid-range offerings to a point where the industry-leading monsters are becoming less and less relevant to the real-world PC buyer. For a third of their price, you can snap up a card using similar architecture and providing a broadly similar gaming experience.

In the case of the TwinTech GeForce GTS250 XT OC Edition, that's exactly what you get – plus, usefully, a little more. The manufacturer has upped the core and memory clocks of this value offering marginally, from 738MHz to 750MHz for the core, and 2,200MHz to 2,300MHz for the 512MB of GDDR3 RAM.

Then, to make sure it's adequately cooled, TwinTech has fitted a more effective, twin-fan heat-pipe cooling system to the PCB. However, although the cooling performance might be better, the

exposed look and awkward dimensions (just bigger than your regular two-slot cooling arrangement) don't seem ideal to us. What if you wanted to take advantage of its 3-Way SLI capabilities? You'd likely have some issues squeezing them all in!

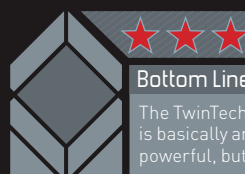
Performance-wise, the mild OC brings this GTS250 more in line with the subsequently introduced HD 4770 range (at stock speeds for the ATI). And although lagging behind the Radeon very marginally in the de facto synthetic benchmark, 3DMark Vantage, with a GPU score of 6,510, the TwinTech fights back in real-world gaming applications – most notably good old *Crysis*, in which it manages an average frame rate of 46.65fps at 1,280 x 1,024 with all settings on high. Crank this demanding game up to very high, and the result is an average frame rate that dances just on the wrong side of that 'playable' threshold at 29.57fps (you could game at this detail level if you don't mind the occasional performance falter).

We found that the upgraded cooler is pretty quiet, although not noticeably quieter than the reference designs for this card. Similarly, it manages the GPU operating temperature marginally better, but like everything with this offering, the difference compared with the stock version is small and barely noticeable.

Although we have to commend TwinTech for at least trying to offer something a bit different – most manufacturers do OC models these days, without adjusting the cooling solution in the slightest – it does seem a bit irrelevant. And we wouldn't want to live with the packaging compromise, to be honest; and would, in fact, prefer a closed reference cooler, which will actually fit, if all you have available is (barely) a two-slot space to fit it into.

So, for our money, we'd go for one of the stock GTS250s available, and then OC it to this level ourselves, while retaining the reference cooler and a couple of bucks more in the wallet in case times get tougher still. **NAG**

Russell Bennett



Bottom Line

The TwinTech GeForce GTS250 XT OC Edition is basically an old 9800 GTX+. Still, it's quite powerful, but not exactly powerful enough.

Plus

- + Value for money
- + Factory OC boosts performance

Minus

- It's last-gen hardware
- Overly wide cooling system

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MSI Radeon HD 4890 OC Edition

THE RV790 ISN'T A new GPU anymore, but it certainly is the fastest GPU money can buy. We say GPU specifically, and not graphics card, because its 1GHz clock variant (which is harder to find than AMD TWKR CPUs, of which there are only 100) is actually faster than the GTX285. The MSI HD 4890 OC Edition, however, is the more 'regular' version; but thanks to MSI, this card is clocked at 880MHz out of the box. This may seem like a small boost in clock speed of only 30MHz (850MHz standard), but as with all the OC Edition cards we have tested before, these cards stand out when it comes to overclocking headroom.

This card is no different. It was able to clock at an impressive 1GHz with no voltage adjustments, and the memory managed an impressive 4.7GHz (1,175MHz SDR), which gave the card an incredible 150GB/sec of bandwidth. This card was eventually able to clock up to 1,050MHz, and no amount of further tweaking could help the card scale higher.

It should be noted that this limitation is not because of a fault on the MSI HD 4890: this is a built-in limitation that exists in but a few handpicked samples of the

4890. This also holds true for the very few 1GHz versions of the 4890. With that said, using the MSI OC Edition card was a breeze. With the Catalyst 9.6 drivers, the card was able to go through all the benchmarks and deliver incredible scores. Playing games using this card was great, as it remained cool, with load temperatures never exceeding 70°C – even with the fan at very low speeds.

With the fan speed turned up, the card can get annoyingly loud; but that should not be necessary, even with the card overclocked to 1GHz.

Using two of these cards in your rig, you'd have one of the best gaming configurations money can buy today. Not only will you get better performance than you would with the 4870X2 or GTX295, but you'll also most likely get that performance at a cheaper price, too. There isn't much we can fault the MSI OC Edition card on. It clocks brilliantly and offers great value. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



Specifications

GPU: RV790 (800 stream processors, 55nm + Low-K process)
Memory: 1GB GDDR5
API: DirectX 10.1 / OpenGL 2.1



Bottom Line

Great performance and feature set from one of the best graphics cards ever produced by ATI.

Plus

+ Performance
 + Overclocking

Minus

- Reference cooler
 - 'Thin' software bundle

Supplier → Syntech Web → www.syntechsa.co.za

Patriot Torqx 128GB SSD

SOLID-STATE DRIVES (SSDs) HAVE slowly but surely been decreasing in price. Many still find them far too expensive, but once you have used one, it would be very hard for you to go back to normal magnetic drives. While Intel was the first to get SLC-like performance out of their MLC drives (X25-M), others have been catching up. And in the case of the Patriot Torqx, here is finally a drive that puts out numbers that are head and shoulders above what the Intel drive can deliver.

The Torqx drives are available in 64,128 and 256GB capacities. We had the 128GB drive for review, and unlike with traditional drives, the drive density has no bearing on performance. So, you should get the exact same performance from the 64GB drive as you would from the 256GB drive. The 128GB unit we had is without a doubt the fastest drive we have ever tested. If you compare the Patriot Torqx with the fastest magnetic drive on the market today, the WD Raptor 300GB, it consistently delivers about twice the performance. Add to this the almost nonexistent access times, and you have quite possibly the fastest SSD on the market today.

The Torqx drives are even faster than the Warp series, which was

Specifications

Capacity: 128GB (120GB)
Read Speeds: 260GB/sec
Write Speeds: 180GB/sec
Interface: SATA 3Gb/sec

already impressive. The Torqx drives take performance to a new level. We recorded the fastest Windows shutdown and restart times with this drive: in fact, shutting down and restarting Windows was quicker than POSTing the system. That's a feat even RAIDed Raptor drives cannot achieve.

The numbers in HD Tach were very impressive, with the drive recording over 252GB/sec read speeds and a specification exceeding 187GB/sec. This performance is much appreciated when loading games, large audio projects or just about anything that accesses the disk a lot. This may hold true for many solid-state drives, but particularly the Torqx: it's the fastest drive we have ever tested. At these speeds, setting a fixed page file or one on another disk becomes unnecessary. There isn't a single component upgrade one could perform that would have the same impact as moving from a magnetic



drive to the Patriot Torqx. It's without question the fastest MLC SSD money can buy. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



Bottom Line

The Patriot Torqx is the fastest drive you can buy today.

Plus

+ Performance
 + Access times

Minus

- Price

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BY TARRYN VAN DERBYL

Fanboys: The Gathering

I HATE FANBOYS. I MIGHT'VE waxed verbose for a few paragraphs about how much I hate them, but I made these totally epic cards instead. Cut them out, laminate them, and remember to play one every time someone needs a reminder that they're an insufferable ****.

Also, a big thanks to Bonezmänn, Oaks, Cpt. Monde, and Zakeroph on the NAG forums for volunteering their pictures without knowing what they were going to be used for. Man, you guys are so stupid mwahahaha cool. **NAG**



The PC Fanboy

That's the guy who barges into every console FPS discussion they ever find and (blithely disregarding all context) informs everyone else that a mouse is more accurate than a controller is. He loves to extol the obvious and absolutely irrefutable advantages of PC gaming, like the best graphics, and the best other stuff. He plays *Counter-Strike* and *DotA*, and insists that *Crysis* is the most totally amazing game ever made, because it has the best graphics ever and the best other stuff ever. The PC Fanboy hasn't played any other new games since 2003, because it's all dumbed down for consoles now.



The PS3 Fanboy

In any discussion, the PS3 Fanboy is always quick to prefix any comments with reams of important numbers – how many units Sony has sold in the last week, how many units Sony has sold in the last month, and how many units Sony has sold in the last financial quarter – just to remind everybody that Sony's winning the console war, even when it's not because it actually is. The console war, and winning it, is very important. The SIXAXIS is awesome.



The Xbox 360 Fanboy

This is the sort of person who thinks broadcasting racial epithets during *Halo* matches is so sophisticated, he'll keep on doing it over and over for the entire duration of the game, just in case there are any girls out there who might hear and consider having sex with him. The other 3.2% of Xbox Fanboys have mercifully been too busy complaining about the broken shotgun in *Gears of War 2* over on Epic's forum for the last nine months to be worth much consideration here. Both demographics of Xbox Fanboy know that the Xbox 360 has all the games, and the PS3 has no games; and that the games the PS3 does have is a bunch of Japanese crap anyway.



The Wii Fanboy

Actually, this one's so busy playing a *Mario 64* emulation that he doesn't even know there's a console war going on.



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